

SOUTH PASADENA UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT
Instructional Services



M E M O R A N D U M

TO: Members of the Board of Education

FROM: Christiane Gervais, Assistant Superintendent, Instructional Services

DATE: May 10, 2016

SUBJECT: Approval of Newsela District License for 2016-2017 and 2017-2018

Background

During the 2015-16 school year, third-fifth grade students at all three SPUSD elementary schools and middle school students had access to a computer program called Newsela. The curriculum was purchased, as it was aligned to Common Core Standards and it helped maximize the use of Chromebooks in our classrooms.

Students read high-interest current event articles to help them build English Language Arts skills and concepts. The program helps track students' comprehension and fluency skills and monitors student growth through reading levels (Lexiles).

Over the last two years, teachers have felt that Newsela helped build important reading skills and students were interested and engaged in the content. The reading selections allowed for interesting class discussions, opportunities to respond to written prompts that ask students to reflect at greater depth of knowledge and students were asked to reference the text to provide evidence for a position they took while debating a topic. The program is instrumental in building our students' critical and creative thinking skills.

It is for these reasons, it is requested that continued funding be allocated for the Newsela subscription.

Discussion

In addition, Newsela not only gives students access to informational texts relevant to the real world, but it also allows for differentiated content. Our English Learners and our struggling readers can access the similar content of a particular article because it can be differentiated to their lexile level. For our Spanish speaking English Learners and for our future DI 3-5th grade Spanish classes, these articles are also

available in Spanish. Therefore, no matter their lexile level, all of our students can use these informational texts to have rich discussions about current events.

Fiscal Impact

The cost for a district license for use at five schools will be \$12,000 each year. We negotiated to have the high school added to the district license at no additional cost from the prior year. The two year contract allows us to lock in this price for two years. The contract will begin July 1, 2016. It will be paid from the district's LCFF Supplemental Funds as referenced in the LCAP.

Recommendation

Christiane Gervais, Assistant Superintendent of Instructional Services, recommends that the Board of Education approve the renewal of the district license for Newsela for use at Arroyo Vista, Marengo, Monterey Hills, South Pasadena Middle School, and South Pasadena High School.