

Hamburg tries new school program

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HAMBURG — In an effort to provide additional individual attention to students and raise test scores, school officials in Hamburg said they will be the first school in Sussex County to implement Harcourt's Learnia program for grades 5 through 8 during the 2007-2008 school year.

The program is designed to help teachers know how to focus and refine their instruction so that students who need help get the instruction they need, and students who have mastered the material can move on to new and more stimulating material.

"Learnia will be used to help the teachers direct their instruction toward the needs of the children," said Hamburg Vice Principal, Roger Jinks. "It is an online tool that is going to allow our teachers to see where students need help."

In 2006, the Hamburg Borough School's eighth-grade classes simultaneously attained the county's highest language arts score and the lowest math score. Fourth-grade students performed worse than the state average in both language and math.

Chief School Administrator Steve Engravalle said Learnia will provide training and support to the staff for the utilization and implementation of the program. Three additional professional development courses for teachers will also be offered. The state is paying for the cost of the program in Hamburg, according to Harcourt.

"New Jersey is a real trailblazer as far as providing funding for this kind of program," said Russell Schweiss, spokesperson for Harcourt Assessment.

Schweiss said the Learnia program allows students to take smaller assessment tests throughout the year to test their skills before the state assessment tests are given.

"It is designed so that a lot can be learned if a child answers a problem incorrectly," he explained.

The wrong answers allow teachers to understand where students stopped picking up what they are being taught so that the student doesn't fall behind, he said.

According to its Web site, in the spring of 2003, the state Department of Education replaced the Elementary School Proficiency Assessment with the New Jersey Assessment of Skills and Knowledge, a comprehensive, multi-grade assessment program.

Along with other indicators of student progress, the results of the elementary-level assessments are intended to be used to identify students who need additional instructional support in order to reach the standards in core subjects.

With the enactment of the No Child Left Behind Act, New Jersey uses annual tests for all students in grades 3 through 8.

Federal guidelines are grounded in three main content areas: language arts literacy, mathematics and science.