

NESHAMINY

## Science curriculum uses hands-on learning

*Pennsbury, Council Rock and Pennridge use similar science initiatives.*

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"No more homework! No more books! No more teachers' dirty looks!"

Although most students will likely always have homework, and many kids probably will warrant teachers' dirty looks, some Neshaminy children will soon get one wish out of that age-old summer chant — no more heavy science textbooks.

The district is implementing a new hands-on elementary science curriculum that uses experiment-filled kits as an alternative to lectures and readings, officials said.

"This can give teachers the tools required even if they have no background in science," said Brian Suter, Neshaminy's lead science teacher. "It's a big change, but kids love it because they're discovering on their own."

The program means students can study clouds outside or inspect the differences between sand and salt, Suter said.

A few years ago, several teacher volunteers piloted the program in select classrooms. Last year, the kits were distributed, instead of texts, to kindergarten through third-grade educators. This year, fourth- through sixth graders will push aside their books to engage in labs, administrators said.

The curriculum was developed by the Delta Education and Full Option Science System. A similar syllabus was created by the National Science Resources Center. Both programs are based on Project 2061, which are national standards drafted in the 1980s by the American Association for the Advancement of Science, officials said.

Comparable courses are being used in Pennsbury, Council Rock, Pennridge and New Jersey schools, administrators said.

In Pennsbury, the program not only has increased interest in science, but it's also led to school science fairs, said Fran Nitkin, principal of Oxford Valley Elementary in Falls and that district's elementary science coordinator.

The initial price tag for the curriculum is about \$150,000. The cost to replenish the kits each year could be between \$10,000 and \$12,000, according to Suter.

While replacing texts could cost \$20,000, Superintendent Paul Kadri quickly pointed out that it would be hard to compare the two programs. The books are often too thick for teachers to get through, and since they're expensive, they aren't always exchanged for the most up-to-date editions every year, Kadri said.

"It might not be the most cost effective, but keeping current with science is the better way to go," said Kadri.

Officials hope that by helping kids learn bigger concepts, students will be able to meet not only state and federal mandates but also compete globally.

"More importantly, we'll be graduating students with science-literate minds," Suter said.

"That's a good foundation because we need to promote and provide people who can think and invent to keep us going."