



SPS Remote Learning Resources:



A Report for the School Committee
Amy B. Clouter
Assistant Superintendent, Curriculum, Instruction & Assessment
June 1, 2020

Overview

As you know, data from our [surveys](#) of both families and educators suggest that remote learning in Shrewsbury is working. At the same time, remote learning has not resolved all of the ongoing learning challenges presented by the pandemic. Accordingly, we anticipate gaps in both student experiences and understanding. Our district is not alone in wondering how students will fare in the coming year, and we are positioning ourselves to address this challenge. Simply stated, our success is linked to making the most of summer as an opportunity for extended learning, beyond our traditional summer reading and math practice programs.

Why are additional resources necessary?

A successful reentry is predicated on a plan to mitigate the risk of regression that follows sustained school closure. When school does reopen, however, we know we may need to resume remote learning – and we'll need additional resources to provide differentiated support to all students. This report is designed to provide you with additional information

on the resources we plan to purchase so that you may better understand why the investment is necessary.

How might we effectively engage students in academic practice at a time when most educators are not engaged in instruction? Without teachers, the learning platforms we have in place will not suffice. For that reason Dr. Sawyer asked me to assemble a team to explore tools that could effectively hook children and help us gain information not just about which students engage in independent practice but how they are doing. It became clear pretty quickly that we were looking for smart software.

Specifically, we were looking for dynamic learning tools that:

- could be flexibly used at home or in school
- were engaging and easy for students to use,
- aligned with Massachusetts standards and district goals, and
- effectively adapted content to meet the needs of a range of learners across grade levels

The key to effective instruction is fit. As we considered the tools available we looked for software that asked children to practice high leverage skills. We evaluated eight different platforms in hopes of identifying a tool that would serve us long after summer ended. That said, even the best tool doesn't function by itself. For that reason, we scrutinized the products we considered for features that made learning robust and fun for children. Most importantly, we wanted to find software that assessed students so that content was adjusted to be "just right" for each user. Finally, with next fall in mind, we also wanted a product that could be modified by an educator in the future. I'm happy to report that we found not one, but **three** resources for consideration.

As far as financing these purchases, we will be able to do this through the curriculum budget, with the potential to utilize funds from the Colonial Fund to procure these innovative tools. However, it is a possibility that we

will be able to receive reimbursement through federal CARES Act funds that the town will have available for costs associated with responding to the pandemic. You will also see that we were successful in procuring a grant to cover the cost of one of these resources. In any case, we believe these investments are crucial ones for our district to make.

Remote Learning Resources

[Freckle](#)

Serving over 700,000 students in every state, Freckle software enables



differentiated instruction at home and/or in school. Featuring content across math, English language arts, social studies and science (pictured on the left) this software is tailored to meet the academic needs of students in Grades K-12. More to the point, Freckle is owned by the Renaissance company, leaders in online assessment. In addition to engaging students

with a gamification approach to practice, an investment in this product would enable the district to measure student achievement in math and reading when we return to school and thereafter.

We intend to provide Freckle to families of students in grades K - 8. The cost for serving about 4,100 students for this summer and the entire 2020-2021 school year will be \$62,295, which after negotiation reflects a significant discount from the company's initial quote. This purchase will also afford us access to the aforementioned assessment tools as well.

[ALEKS](#)

Called **A**ssessment and **L**earning in **K**nowledge **S**paces, ALEKS is a web-based application developed by the McGraw Hill company. ALEKS has been in use in Shrewsbury in Grades 9-12 since 2016. A software tool

designed to complement Math instruction, ALEKS is adaptive, too. This means that the software poses questions and uses student answers to teach a student about the topics s/he most needs to learn.

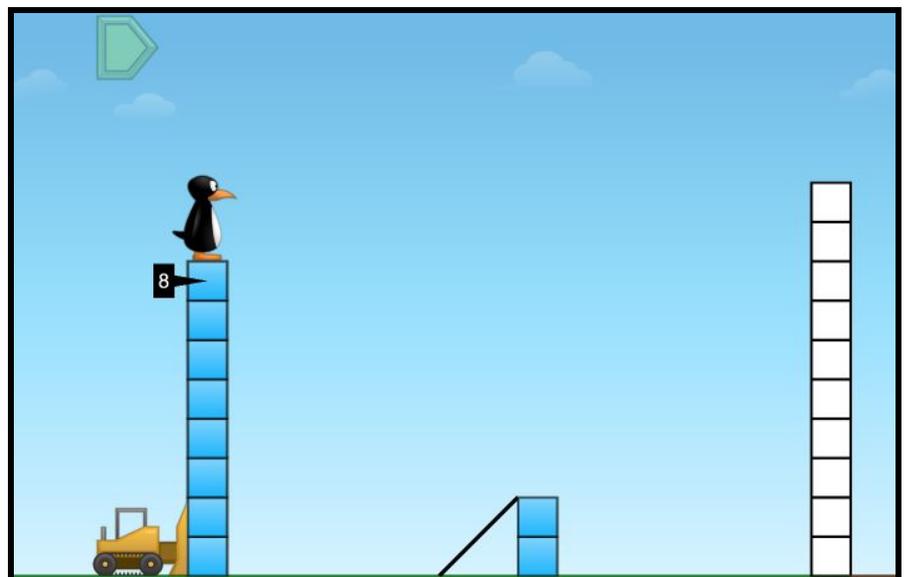


Given the positive results we have seen at the high school level, we'd like to expand the use of ALEKs to include rising eighth and ninth graders. This would cost \$9,990.

ST Math

Developed by the MIND Research Institute, ST Math is endorsed by both the Massachusetts STEM Hub as well as the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. The 'ST' in ST Math stands for *spatial temporal*, and as the name suggests the product was created by a nonprofit neuroscience company. Created to help learners in Grades K-6 master the math fundamentals, the program emphasizes problem solving in multiple domains. Further, the software is purposefully designed with minimal language or cueing for

two reasons:
importantly, this approach enables more students to access the content; further, repeated experience with this software reinforces the value of productive struggle.



In a typical year, we emphasize regular summer reading, math fluency and the importance of self-directed exploration. Yet even with these structures, we know that some students need more support. It's never been more important for our students to practice their skills - and being able to practice independently is a skill that will serve them well whatever comes next.

I am delighted to report that Shrewsbury was successfully awarded the use of ST math for students in grades K-6 for free through June, 2021. Given that an annual district subscription to ST Math typically costs between \$6,000-\$10,000 this is a considerable savings.

Conclusion

In a typical year, we emphasize regular summer reading, math fluency and the importance of self-directed exploration. Yet even with these components in place, we know that some students need structured support. It's never been more important for our students to practice their skills. Being able to practice independently is a skill that will serve all our students well whatever comes next. We believe that providing Freckle as an opportunity to maintain and build skills in English language arts, social studies, and science is important, while providing experiences in math with both Freckle and ST Math (and ALEKS for rising 8th and 9th graders) will provide an important combination of opportunities for summer learning, along with opportunities for remote learning in the coming school year depending on how the pandemic evolves.