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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

February 7, 2019

Partnership with Reading Now Network Improves Performance for Grand Haven Elementary Students

GRAND HAVEN, MI – Early reading proficiency is one of the key indicators for students’ future success - and for students at Peach Plains Elementary, a focus on literacy has proven successful across subjects. Overall test scores for Peach Plains increased by 15% since the school partnered with the Reading Now Network in 2016, according to the Michigan Department of Education’s Parent Dashboard.

“We continuously work to improve our students’ reading performance based on standardized test scores, and are always looking to grow as teachers and educators,” says Peach Plains Principal Kathryn Drake. “Partnering with the Reading Now Network brought literacy experts directly into our school, giving us the tools to continue learning ourselves and live out our own reading lives.”

The Reading Now Network (RNN) is a collective effort of superintendents, school boards and school districts throughout West Michigan to improve early literacy. After a field study in 2014, RNN established a set of five core elements common in schools where students’ reading scores were outperforming similar schools. The RNN team now visits individual schools and, based on these “Roots of Reading Success,” makes customized recommendations to help improve reading levels.

For Peach Plains, the key areas of focus included identifying and incorporating literacy practices into every single lesson and using data to better inform intervention lessons and plans. “Thanks to recommendations from RNN, we’ve given students more of a voice in their reading material, which means they are so much more invested in their own learning,” says Drake. “We still have very clear expectations for our students, but we’re giving them a say in how to reach those.”

“We dove into understanding what kind of data we needed to collect to determine what students actually need, and we have weekly grade level data meetings to make decisions together,” says Jennifer Kenny, Peach Plains literacy coach.

Currently, only about 67% of all Michigan 3rd graders read at grade level. The State’s goal is to reach 80%, and while Ottawa County already has some of the highest elementary literacy levels in Michigan, the Ottawa Area ISD has embraced RNN initiatives to set students across the county up for success.

“RNN is really about teaching and learning, focusing on collaboration among educators to bring literacy into every subject,” says Doug Greer, Director of Instructional Services for the Ottawa Area ISD.

“My conferences with students show me that their thinking is being pushed and that they are reflecting on their learning now more than ever. It’s been a very rewarding experience,” says Peach Plains 2nd grade teacher Beth Bolhuis.

Grand Haven Area Public Schools is a district of distinction for students preschool through 12th grade. With a goal of providing exceptional educational experiences, GHAPS is committed to success for all students and strives to provide exemplary programs and opportunities to meet the diverse needs of students.

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