



**SUCCESS STORY**

***StudySync®* Boosts Reading Scores  
in a Tech-Friendly School**

**ABOUT THE SCHOOL**

Name  
West View Elementary School

Location  
Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

Type  
Suburban

Enrollment  
518 Students

West View Elementary School is one of four K-6 elementary schools in the North Hills School District. The district, located in a Pittsburgh suburb in northern Allegheny County, serves more than 4,300 students in grades K-12. With more than 40 percent of its students considered economically disadvantaged, the school is designated as a Title I reading and math school.

**42%**

ECONOMICALLY  
DISADVANTAGED

**85%**

CAUCASIAN

**7%**

MULTIRACIAL

**4%**

AFRICAN AMERICAN

**3%**

HISPANIC

**ENROLLMENT**

## Committed to digital literacy

North Hills has made a commitment to educational technology and is implementing a phased approach to provide all students with digital devices. In 2016-17, the district's "Project Connect" distributed iPads to all 934 students in sixth, seventh, and eighth grades—including the sixth grade at West View—and plans to provide all students with devices in the coming years. According to the district's website, North Hills also plans to use technology as a tool for personalizing instruction for every student, "cultivating an innovative and problem-solving learning environment."



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Shannon Diven,  
Teacher



## Choosing an ELA curriculum for a digital age

With the move towards more robust digital learning, the district in 2015-16 piloted *StudySync*®, the premier digital English Language Arts (ELA) curriculum for grades 6-12, in two sixth-grade classrooms.

*StudySync* provides a multimedia-enhanced, comprehensive core curriculum with a library of hundreds of texts and text excerpts. Aligned to

state standards, *StudySync* offers instruction in reading, writing, listening, and speaking, as well as differentiation resources and assessment tools that ensure student readiness for high-stakes tests. Early pilot successes at North Hills prompted the district to implement *StudySync* in all sixth-grade classrooms in 2016-17 and conduct additional pilot programs in grades seven, eight, and nine.

"We believe strongly in digital literacy and technology to supplement learning," said Dr. Jeff Taylor, assistant superintendent for curriculum, assessment and elementary education. "We wanted to see if we could better engage students in ELA. I feel that we have."

## Meeting student needs is paramount at North Hills

Shannon Diven is a 17-year veteran of West View, where she teaches reading, math, social studies, and science in a self-contained sixth-grade classroom that piloted *StudySync* in 2015-16. As a member of the district pilot committee charged with looking for a new ELA curriculum, Diven said it was clear that students were not learning up to their potential.

"The basal series was not meeting our needs," she said. "Kids were not performing at a level where they could analyze text or literature. They were not being exposed to reading excerpts or text that was rigorous or challenging enough."

Diven said the district began looking for a program that would expose students to rigorous texts while also providing a better quality of literature than they had used before.

"We started looking at *StudySync* and found that the texts were challenging—they were at or higher than grade level—and that it was also an online curriculum. *StudySync* has great selections, with great skills built into it, and it aligns with (Pennsylvania's core standards)."

## A more engaged classroom

Diven saw a clear difference in her classroom when she began using *StudySync*. She said that her students are now excited about reading and are more likely to talk about texts in class.

“Now, kids will finish an excerpt, and then they’re on their way to the library to check out the whole book,” she explained. “They will ask, ‘At recess, could we sit and talk about it?’ I truly believe this is impacting them as lifelong readers.”

One feature of the curriculum that has been particularly impactful, according to Diven, is *StudySync*® TV. These high-quality videos model student collaboration and discussion and, “changed the climate of my classroom discussions so much, because kids don’t necessarily know how to have an academic discussion. That needs to be taught,” Diven said. She further explained, “So, we can set up discussions to model *StudySync*® TV. (Students) prepare for their roles and are assigned certain tasks, and since they know what their role is, everybody participates now. All of a sudden, they’re not afraid to say, ‘I think this,’ or, ‘Maybe we should consider that.’ I have no problem with participation now.”



*We’re committed to providing rigorous curriculum and establishing standards so kids can go beyond them. StudySync has been a tremendous asset for us.*

Dr. Jeff Taylor,  
Assistant Superintendent for  
Curriculum, Assessment and  
Elementary Education



## Real-time feedback for differentiated learning

Because *StudySync* assignments are submitted online, it allowed Diven to monitor student assignments, score them, and provide feedback to her students in real time. She explained this benefit, saying, “I can pull those four or five kids who aren’t doing very well and say, ‘Today you’re going to work with me,’ or, ‘This group is going to work over here,’ or, ‘This group is going to work independently.’ It allows me to see the groups all at once instead of walking from desk-to-desk and trying to figure it out.”

## Early gains show significant promise

According to Dr. Jeff Taylor, North Hills has high expectations for all its students.

“We’re committed to providing rigorous curriculum and establishing standards so kids can go beyond them,” Taylor said. “*StudySync* has been a tremendous asset for us.”

So far, Taylor has seen real gains in Diven’s class after using *StudySync*. Before the pilot year, students in her class were scoring at about 69 percent on the Pennsylvania System of School Assessment.

“After we implemented *StudySync*, it was about 90 percent, which is phenomenal in one year to see that much growth,” said Taylor.

## Fun to teach again

Shannon Diven credits *StudySync* not only with reinvigorating her students, but with energizing her own outlook on teaching.

“I was at the point in my career where I was so bored with what I was doing,” she said. “The kids were so bored, and the stories so unrelatable. I was at the point where I didn’t know how much longer I could do this—the routine of reading a story, asking five questions—I was in such a rut with that. This has changed everything about how I feel about teaching reading.”