

Syncing 6–12 English Language Arts Instruction with **The Way Students Like to Learn**

Your Guide to Selecting a
Core ELA Curriculum for
Student Engagement and
Improved Performance

*With Answers to Commonly Asked
Product-Selection Questions*



It's no secret that literacy and its foundational skills are critical to helping students reach academic goals in all subject areas, preparing students for college and career, and creating informed, global citizens.

So, how do schools and districts engage 6–12 English language arts (ELA) students to develop the reading, writing, and critical thinking skills they need to succeed in school and beyond?

Robert Romano, co-founder of BookheadEd Learning, LLC, a California-based product-development company that leverages technologies to engage students with products like *StudySync*®, tells us, “...The most important thing is to find a context by which a student can get a point of entry and then generate curiosity. If a student doesn't have that point of entry...and if you're unable to generate some curiosity, some point of reference that makes them (students) feel it's relevant to them, you'll lose them.¹”

As educators seek ELA curricula to provide those points of entry and successfully engage students for improved performance, many questions arise.

- 1 What Should Schools and Districts Look for in an ELA Curriculum to Help Engage Students?**
- 2 What Types of Instructional Formats Should an ELA Curriculum Provide to Ensure Students Relate to Content?**
- 3 What Differentiation Tools Can a 6–12 ELA Curriculum Offer to Help Teachers Reach Every Student?**
- 4 What Foundational Strategies Should Be the Basis for Building a Curriculum for Improved Student Performance?**

The purpose of this eBook is to answer educators' questions about how to find the right curriculum to engage students and achieve higher ELA proficiency.

1 What Should Schools and Districts Look for in an ELA Curriculum to Help Engage Students?

The key to engagement is relatability. Get students to relate to content with a curriculum that provides teachers with the tools to teach the way students like to learn—through rich, multimedia experiences and social media, along with meaningful points of entry. Students tend to do well when curricula provide attractive entry points².

Educators seeking a core 6–12 ELA curriculum should look for a program with lesson components that make the learning relevant. These include:

- Videos and movie-like trailers that bring core, classic, and contemporary texts to life and build excitement for reading
- A library of thousands of texts, ever-expanding, to include classics and build on their foundations with the continuous addition of new texts and excerpts that add breadth to the literature
- Hundreds of full-length works from which students can browse and make their own novel selection, including a variety of Spanish-language titles and authentic literature from diverse cultures
- Modeling of academic discussion to build critical-thinking skills
- Social media-style writing assignments that encourage students to form and share fact-based opinions in a safe environment



StudySync, an engaging and literature-rich 6–12 ELA core curriculum, developed in partnership with McGraw-Hill Education, was designed to help teachers provide points of entry to which Romano refers, and generate the curiosity necessary to create truly engaged students.

Lynsay Mills, 9th grade writing teacher and Dean of English at Sci Academy, founding school of Collegiate Academies, Recovery School District of Louisiana, says, “The *Blasts* (social media-style writing assignments) have helped students greatly with making the read-write connection on timely, relevant, and real-world issues. With these assignments, students are challenged to think critically and voice informed opinions on topics that matter.³”



Bringing Literacy to Life with StudySync

2 What Types of Instructional Formats Should an ELA Curriculum Provide to Ensure Students Relate to Content?

Seek a curriculum that gives students the same multimedia access they experience in their everyday lives.

Educators should look for curriculum, like *StudySync*, with content formats that:

- Use video with student presenters as a dominant means of engaging and modeling
- Can be accessed on any device and include downloadable apps for offline access to assignments
- Provide full print support for low-tech environments, including teachers' editions and consumable student reading and writing companions
- Offer access to paperback novels for low-tech environments, in addition to digital texts
- Provide a variety of writing opportunities including short, social media-like writing assignments and peer reviews
- Offer podcasts and other audio content to support speaking and listening skills

According to Nancy Hoppe, 9th, 10th, and 11th-grade ELA teacher, Lincoln High School, Lincoln, CA, podcasting has proven an extremely engaging way to get students to relate to content and help them become more effective readers, writers, listeners, and speakers⁴.

StudySync's podcasts were introduced at the perfect time for Hoppe, modeling for students what makes an effective podcast. Here are six strategies Hoppe shared for guiding students in developing podcasts:

1. Identify topics by brainstorming
2. Challenge students to think outside of the box
3. Find the right platform
4. Write the story before recording the podcast
5. Tailor the podcast to the audience
6. Remind students to appeal to the ear

StudySync's scripts for the "School of Thought" podcasts have become the model for Hoppe's 9th and 10th grade ELA students in developing both their own writing and audio prompts.

A few examples of podcasts that Hoppe's students have developed include: *Is Football a Safe Sport?*, *The Mindset of a Runner*, and *Thoughts on Racial Discrimination*.



Kate Hertz, English teacher, Geneva High School, Geneva, IL had been looking for digital solutions that would encourage more engaging student discussions and began piloting *StudySync*.

She reports, "I've used *StudySync* with AP® students, struggling students, and everything in between, and I find that it gives all of them more control over their reading and writing skills.⁵"

According to Hertz, the key is her students' abilities to give authentic feedback through the anonymous peer reviews and the social media-like *Blasts* that encourage students to form and share opinions.

Similarly, Shannon Diven, 6th grade teacher, West View Elementary School, Pittsburgh, PA also found *StudySync* offered points of entry for students learning how to better have classroom discussions.

According to Diven, one feature of the curriculum that has been particularly impactful is *StudySync*® TV, with its high-quality videos modeling student collaboration and discussion. Diven said, "(It) 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.⁶"

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Doug Fisher, PhD and Dean of Faculty Affairs, Health Sciences High and Middle College, San Diego, CA, said, “When I ask teachers about *StudySync*, they say, ‘It’s easy,’ which is important to me. What they need is a resource that is not scripted, but helps them design amazing experiences for students. I was a little surprised. I thought it (*StudySync*) was good. I didn’t know it was going to be this great.”⁷”



3 What Differentiation Tools Should a 6–12 ELA Curriculum Offer to Help Teachers Reach Every Student?

Look for a curriculum with planning and teaching tools that help teachers to more efficiently and effectively differentiate instruction.

Find a program, like *StudySync*, that includes:

- Content and activities that enable students to learn in the ways most comfortable to them, ranging from student consumables to personal devices
- A library containing diverse authors and content, searchable by Lexile®-level, grade level, standards, and more

- Targeted text selections to help differentiate learning while building the strength and stamina students need to tackle increasingly complex texts
- Digital text selections with embedded audio and video enhancement to ensure all students are equally engaged with rigorous content
- Leveled texts in units to support Beginner, Intermediate, and Advanced English learners (ELs)
- Structured, leveled lessons with differentiated instruction to engage and support struggling readers and ELs
- Native Spanish fiction and non-fiction texts
- Audio playback of text with audio highlighting of text with tempo control, for students to see and hear how syntax and grammar shape language
- Interactive vocabulary instruction
- Lexile®-leveled, social media-like writing assignments, connecting students to current events

Lynsay Mills, Sci Academy, explains how *StudySync* with all of its resources and tools, helps her accomplish differentiated learning goals in her 9th grade writing classes. She says, “*StudySync* has enabled me to do more quickly what the best educator in me wants to do. I am able to plan with more ease, which frees up my time so that I can focus on my instruction and work with my scholars individually to meet their learning needs.”³”

Catlin Tucker, English language arts teacher, Windsor High School, Windsor, CA discusses the benefits of blended learning models, like *StudySync*, to differentiate and personalize instruction. With blended learning models, she says, “Students have online resources at their disposal. If I connect them with a resource online, they can revisit that resource as many times as they need to be successful.”

She continues, “It gives them the time and the space to make sense of the information. And I can use online tools to personalize the practice they’re doing for where they are in their skill level, which is an incredible thing to be able to do.”⁸ *StudySync* is one of Tucker’s go-to online resources.

4 What Foundational Strategies Should Be the Basis for Building a Curriculum for Improved Student Performance?

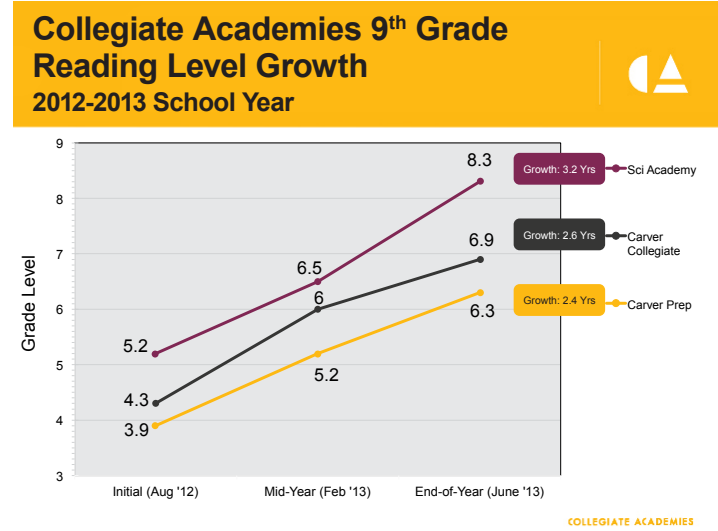
Students perform better in a world they understand. Performance, like engagement, hinges on making material relevant to students and helping them take ownership of their learning.

Look for a curriculum, like *StudySync*, that:

- Meets students where they are, making them comfortable to ask questions, but challenging them to meet high expectations so they are less likely to be bored and disengaged⁹
- Provides extensive student collaboration opportunities and academic discussion that make the learning relevant, with:
 - > Video (*StudySync*® TV and *SkillsTV*)
 - > Current events assignments (*Blasts*)
 - > Online anonymous peer reviews
 - > Collaborative writing and research projects
- Includes multimedia tools that inspire students to learn on a deeper level

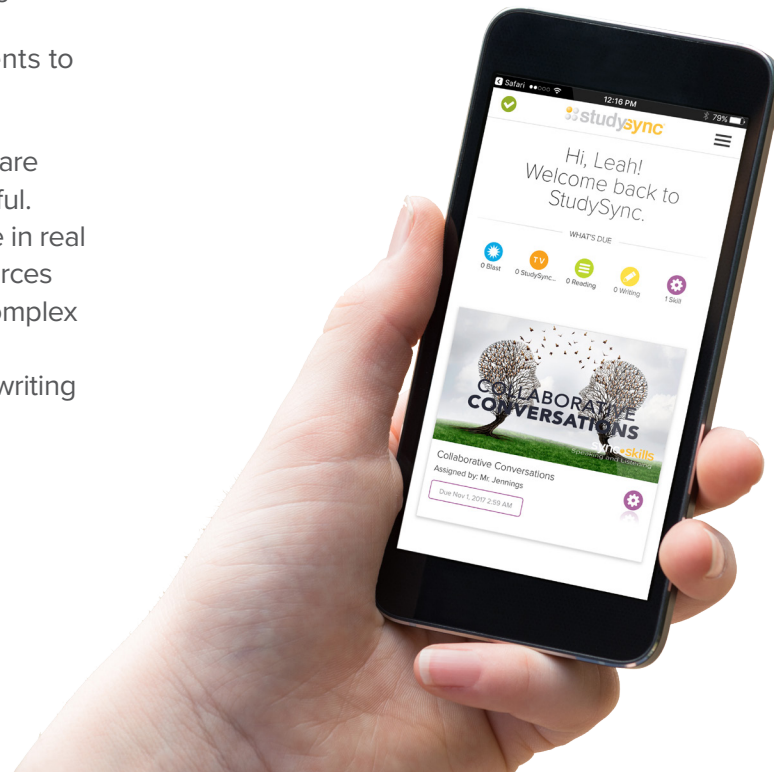
Lynsay Mills, Sci Academy, notes, “The students are finding the instant peer reviews extremely helpful. They can type in their assignments and collaborate in real time with their classmates. This engagement reinforces understanding and confidence when diving into complex texts. My students also love that the reviews are anonymous. This eases any apprehensions about writing authentic reviews.”³

According to Director of Literacy for Collegiate Academies, Lisa Shea, the school looked to *StudySync* for tools to engage and inspire students with relatable and diverse resources. Efforts paid off.³



Heather Dagleish, 6th grade Language Arts teacher, Troy Intermediate School, Avon Lake, OH has been using *StudySync* since Fall 2016. Her general ELA students grew an average of 4.5 points in 2016 after implementing *StudySync*, compared to an average growth of 1.8 points during the year prior. Dagleish’s advanced students grew an average of 2.7 points in 2016 after implementing *StudySync*, compared to 1.7 points in the year prior.

Dagleish says of the program, “I love it because we are seeing results. I feel strongly that we are doing what’s right for our kids.”¹⁰



Ellison says, students, “have been so completely engaged...they are making connections to other reading selections, and they are using what they have learned in other classes.”¹¹

Elizabeth Ellison, Robert C. Fisler School, emphasizes, that students, “have read and re-read such a great selection of texts and have become so confident in their abilities. They use literary terms and apply them because they have seen it modeled so well in *StudySync* by students they can relate to.”¹¹

Dr. Jeff Taylor, assistant superintendent for curriculum, assessment, and elementary education for North Hills School District, Pittsburgh, PA where 6th grade teacher, Shannon Diven, piloted *StudySync*, says, “We wanted to see if we could better engage students in ELA. I feel that we have.”

Taylor continues, “Before the pilot year, students in her (Diven’s) 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.”⁶ Diven continues to use and have success with the program.

Elizabeth Ellison, 8th grade English language arts and English language essentials teacher, Robert C. Fisler School, Fullerton, CA incorporated *StudySync* in the 2012-13 school year as a trial. Now she uses *StudySync* everyday, and 7th and 8th graders across the whole district use *StudySync*’s core literacy program.

Fisler School Benchmark Assessment before and after using *StudySync*

	LITERACY PROGRESS BEFORE STUDYSYNC	LITERACY PROGRESS AFTER STUDYSYNC	
STUDENTS AT GRADE LEVEL	26 Students	68 Students	161% Increase
ADEQUATE PROGRESS	33 Students	31 Students	6% Decrease
LIMITED PROGRESS	27 Students	6 Students	78% Decrease
MINIMAL PROGRESS	20 Students	1 Student	95% Decrease

Because students perform better in a world they understand, McGraw-Hill Education and *StudySync* have partnered to help teachers teach the way 6–12 ELA students like to learn.

See how *StudySync* can work in your classroom, school, or district.

[Contact Your Rep](#)

References

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