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EDUCATION

Houghton Mifflin launches 'Netflix for learning'



The parent dashboard in Curious World allows parents to view their child's learning progress.

By Jessica Geller

October 21, 2015

Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Co. said Wednesday it is launching its Curious World website and updated app, which includes educational videos, games, and eBooks for kids between the ages of 3 and 7.

The Boston-based publisher first introduced Curious World in November 2014 with a "simple app" that was free to download and included in-app purchases, said CJ Kettler, chief of consumer brands and strategy at Houghton Mifflin.

Now the revised Curious World, which is named in part for Houghton Mifflin's popular Curious George, is a subscription-based technology for \$9.99 per month, or \$79.99 for one year.

Parents create a profile on their child's behalf, and Curious World curates custom recommendations for kids to play, read, and watch.

"It's Netflix for learning," Kettler said. "We have built a full-fledged content service."

Curious World contains more than 500 unique titles, such as Houghton Mifflin's Curious George, Gossie, and The Polar Express, and content from outside partners, including National Geographic Kids, StoryBots, and PBS Digital. New content will be added on a weekly basis.

Curious World is similar to LeapFrog Enterprises Inc., another provider of playful learning. But Kettler said the Houghton Mifflin brand means parents trust the content that is selected based on a child's age, giving kids "a balanced diet of the eight key learning areas."

These learning areas include the basic science, math, and language, and less concrete lessons of health and wellness, family and community, and social and emotional development. Curious World combines the online and offline worlds, Kettler said, as some of the activities encourage

kids to dance with Curious George or create bubbles. Learning is taken further beyond the screen with tips for parents on real-world learning activities for the whole family.

Parents can also check their child's progress through the parent dashboard online or in the app, which is free to download. The app is currently only available on iOS, but an Android-compatible version is expected in 2016.

Curious World is just one of several recent announcements from the book publisher as it tries to reinvent itself following bankruptcy in 2012. Houghton Mifflin said last month it is launching HMH Marketplace, online tools and games for educators to use in the classroom, in 2016.

Earlier this year, Houghton Mifflin acquired Scholastic Corp.'s educational technology and services business for \$575 million. Stock prices rose overall in the summer months, but have fallen back to pre-acquisition prices, closing on Tuesday at \$20.95, which is about 22 percent lower than the 2015 high in June.

Kettler said it is too early to see how the Scholastic acquisition affects Curious World. But she said the combination of acquiring online educational tool Curiosityville in 2014 and Scholastic will help further how Houghton Mifflin contributes assets to Curious World over time.