BEAUFORT, SC – The Beaufort County Public School District is at the forefront of a growing practice among schools to use surplus end-of-year funds to expand their digital content offerings.

Beaufort and other districts say this provides them the ability to offer students and educators fresh, in-demand titles when they return for the start of the new term – a critical factor in ensuring deep engagement with digital content.

EXCITEMENT FOR EBOOKS

The Beaufort schools serve roughly 20,000 PreK-12 students from across the socio-economic spectrum on the scenic southern tip of the state. Known for its strong focus on integrating technology into the classroom, the district recently successfully implemented a 1:1 device program for grades 3-12, and has partnered with OverDrive to deliver digital content to students and educators since 2011.

Anne Aita coordinates the district’s OverDrive service, which connects thousands of readers with thousands of digital titles every month. She said leveraging surplus end-of-year funds to grow the district’s selection of digital titles has played an important role in building student and educator interest in eBooks. “Word travels” among students when popular titles are available via OverDrive at the start of the year, she said, boosting digital circulation numbers.

Aita also performs staff training for the district’s OverDrive service at the beginning of each year, and said having new titles to promote during these sessions builds educator enthusiasm around digital content. It’s been proven that one of the best ways to increase student usage of digital content is to have educators on board as active users.

“If I can tell (educators) ‘Hey, remember last year when we didn’t have this book? Well, now we do,’ that helps them buy into (the OverDrive service) more,” Aita said.

Aita said Beaufort’s 2015 end-of-year surplus purchase will focus primarily on digital titles for elementary readers, who’ve shown to be the most avid users of the district’s OverDrive service. Popular fiction series like Diary of a Wimpy Kid and The Hunger Games will likely be included.

“A KEY DYNAMIC”

Herb Miller, director of OverDrive Education, said an important step for schools in making an end-of-year surplus purchase of digital content is coordinating across departments to locate available funds. Title I, special education, ELL/ESL, school-based discretionary and curriculum are areas OverDrive partners have commonly pulled from. OverDrive then helps ensure these funds are used properly based on any guidelines identifying what students the digital content must serve, he said.

Miller said schools are also taking advantage of delayed invoicing, using a combination of the current year and next year’s funds to create a more robust collection of digital content.

“There’s a direct correlation between the availability and selection of digital content and the usage,” he said. “Utilizing end-of-year funds for a digital content credit with OverDrive has been a key dynamic that we’re seeing many districts now use to enhance their student engagement as they plan for the summer and next school year.”