Digital content adoption increases equity and accessibility

OverDrive provides Colorado district with thousands of eBooks and audiobooks for digital library and curriculum

With over 33,000 students and 52 school sites, it can be challenging to provide accessible content to all students in the St. Vrain Valley School District. Another challenge for the district located north of Denver is economic disparity, which can make achieving equity difficult.

“We have pockets of wealth and pockets of poverty in our district,” says Kahle Charles, executive director of curriculum for St. Vrain. “But we wanted all students to have access to the same resources.”

The plan at St. Vrain is to go fully 1-to-1 in several years. However, for the devices to be effective, they must have the right digital content. In January 2015, the first priority was finding a program that contained high-quality, full-length texts that align to Colorado’s ELA standards for grades 6 through 12.

“We wanted students to have 24/7 access to both novels and nonfiction works,” says Charles. “We also wanted to sort texts based on a student’s interest, Lexile level and classroom curriculum.”

Other requirements included having annotation, highlighting and other close reading tools. An evaluation committee reviewed several platforms before deciding on OverDrive, which offers over 2 million titles from over 5,000 publishers. Students can access audiobooks, eBooks and video by installing the OverDrive app on their school-issued iPad or their personal device, or they can read and listen in a web browser. They have access to their digital books online or offline, even if a student is without an internet connection.

“OverDrive is always up and running,” says Charles. “We’ve experienced no downtime, so our students are always able to read.”

In addition to sets of texts for specific middle and high school classes, the district has a 62,000-title digital library through OverDrive. Over 29,000 works were checked out between January and May 2015. Principals also use OverDrive for faculty professional development.

“If a principal wants to use a particular PD book with his faculty, we will purchase it through OverDrive,” says Charles. “Then that book can be used again by another faculty book study group, or any staff member in the district.”

Working with OverDrive also helps St. Vrain support local libraries. Because OverDrive is a provider for every public library in Colorado, if a student has a library card, they can access both their local library and district library in their OverDrive app.

“We are getting kids to read more and more,” says Charles.

OverDrive’s team supports St. Vrain educators and administrators in multiple ways. They provide training on how to purchase the digital books—which take less than 24 hours to be loaded into the digital library—and work with administrators to procure texts that are not yet in OverDrive’s collection.

“They even help us identify nonfiction texts and primary resources that fit into our curriculum,” says Charles. “We simply ask what they recommend on a certain topic and they prepare a collection for us to consider.”

Student, parent and educator feedback has been overwhelmingly positive, says Charles. Students are reading more than ever before, and moreover, they are reading rigorous texts. Students are also increasing their content knowledge, enabling teachers to create deeper lessons. This success was reflected by St. Vrain’s selection by the Learning Counsel as a top 10 district in the U.S. for Digital Curriculum and Content Strategy.

“Now, instead of having a collection of print books that stay in the classroom or a library of novels that are not aligned to standards, we have thousands of texts that can be accessed 24/7 by all of our students, no matter where they are,” says Charles.

For more information, visit www.overdrive.com/schools
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