Flexible eBook platform helps to reach diverse student populations

California district embraces OverDrive’s digital reading platform to increase digital footprint

At Napa Valley USD in northern California, classroom technology integration has been a priority since 1997, when the district opened the country’s first New Technology High School. So bringing in digital books in order to provide easily accessible content to the 18,000 students and faculty in 34 schools was a natural—and important—step.

“The challenge was how to provide content to support our project-based learning structure and to do so on a limited budget,” says Kate MacMillan, coordinator of library services and digital resource project manager. “E-content is more durable and easier to disseminate than print books.”

Criteria for the right solution

OverDrive, with a catalog of over 2 million eBooks and audiobooks, was selected by Napa Valley leadership in 2012 to serve as the district’s digital library and source for classroom novels and textbooks.

“OverDrive works with all devices. Students can access books online and offline through the OverDrive app, which is straightforward, easy to use and attractive,” says MacMillan.

That offline access is critical for California schools, which must comply with the Williams Act of 2005, and with the recent ACLU Digital Instructional Materials brief defining student digital access. Napa Valley USD partners with the Napa County Library, and MacMillan appreciates that the partnership enables students to use their school OverDrive account to also access public library books.

OverDrive also provides districts with access to collections of books at elementary, middle and high school levels, so students are not restricted to a set of books for their individual school. Metered access enables school librarians to keep a select number of checkouts for a specific book for a specified period of time, keeping collections fluid and dynamic.

“Over the years, too many times a class set of print novels may be in good condition but no longer used, and then sits in storage until discarded,” says MacMillan. “OverDrive works with publishers to allow us to purchase digital novel sets for 12 or 36 months, and then reevaluate if we need to purchase again.”

Unexpected benefits

While the elimination of manual processes—such as the need for clerks to check in physical books and processing the billing of parents for late fees—was expected, “There are additional advantages we had not anticipated that have been wonderful surprises,” says MacMillan.

Getting students comfortable reading digital texts helps them with preparing to take assessments online, notes Sandy Killian, high school teacher librarian.

“Students have told me about the value of OverDrive’s highlighting and note-taking tools because of the increased use of these tools in future state testing,” she says. Students can search for digital books based on their Lexile level. This feature appeals to the large population of ESL students in the district, who appreciate the ability to search for non-fiction English eBooks that meet their reading level, which likely does not match their grade level, from the privacy of their personal devices.

“All students have books they do not want their peers to know they are reading, adds Killian. “We never expected this, but the privacy is so important to these kids.”

As the years pass, OverDrive becomes more embedded in the Napa Valley culture, says MacMillan.

“What I like about OverDrive is that we are constantly finding more and more ways to use it,” she says. “It is embedded in our Vision Plan as an important resource that will increase our digital footprint. As a district, we have fully embraced it.”

For more information, visit http://overdrive.com/schools
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