More digital choices lead to more reading

Through e-content provider OverDrive, Texas district sees major upswing in books read

Increasing the use of digital library content was one of the goals outlined in the North East Independent School District’s (ISD) instructional improvement plan starting in the 2013-14 school year. The San Antonio district, which enrolls 68,000 students, had many eBooks and digital audiobooks, but most students were simply not using the content.

“It is hard to provide everything students could want in one print collection,” says Faye Hagerty, director of library services. “But online collections allow us to provide far more options.”

Though digital libraries do not have the size restraints of physical spaces, North East ISD needed a targeted, purposeful effort to increase student access to the large amount of content available to them.

Immediate results
One of North East ISD’s online collections is through OverDrive, a provider of over 2 million titles from over 5,000 publishers. Audiobooks and eBooks are available to students on any device, anytime and anywhere. Librarians can create book collections that are curated based on school level (elementary, middle and high school) to narrow the search for students casually browsing for something to read. OverDrive digital books are available through any web browser, or an app, where users can download texts to be read even offline.

“While we have professional development and nonfiction content, OverDrive is primarily used for leisure reading of fiction titles,” says Hagerty. “Our staff members use it as well; they love listening to an audiobook while they drive.”

North East ISD librarians often offer incentive programs to increase OverDrive usage, especially during vacation time. Posters in the library and around the school encourage students to read in print and digitally.

“Our goal in our first year was to have 100 percent increase in usage of our OverDrive digital collection from the previous year, and we actually increased usage by 200 percent in one year.”

On a monthly basis, Hagerty will email commendations to the principal and librarian of the top 10 schools in the district for OverDrive circulation.

“Principals like a little friendly competition, so this keeps them invested in searching for ways to keep their students reading,” she says.

Unique insights
OverDrive’s administrative functions provide Hagerty with information that makes book ordering simple.

“I can monitor our hold statistics at any time,” she says. “If a book has 40 holds, I know it’s popular and I can immediately order more copies.”

And OverDrive’s flexible ordering model helps keep school libraries current. “If I purchase 26 checkouts for a single book, when those checkouts run out, I can assess whether the book is one we want to keep or a flash-in-the-pan trend that is not necessary in our collection going forward,” says Hagerty.

Factors for success
Crucial for getting students to read digital texts is teaching them how to read in this unique format, says Hagerty. Librarians lead training sessions several times a year to go over the platform’s highlights and to ensure everyone knows how to set up OverDrive on their devices.

“Students must be trained on how to access eBooks and use digital annotation tools,” says Hagerty. “Educators need to teach digital reading strategies the same way they need to teach print reading strategies.”

Excellent customer service is another highlight of the OverDrive program, says Hagerty.

“I love that we are able to get ahold of someone really quickly for questions or issues,” she says. “OverDrive is always improving its product.”

For more information, www.overdrive.com/schools
View, comment, share this story online at http://DAmag.me/ods

As seen in District Administration
June 2016