OFFERING MORE WAYS TO GET KIDS TO READ

When the Mesquite Independent School District’s Library Services department set about updating its vision statement in 2009, the team determined it was time to expand the libraries’ digital footprint.

“We were saying ‘We want to offer more ways to get kids to read’,” Library Technology Facilitator Debbie Swartz said.

A large district serving 40,000 preK-12 students across 46 campuses in suburban Dallas, Mesquite at the time did offer extensive nonfiction digital resources to support research and other curriculum-based needs. However, students still had to visit the physical libraries for access to popular fiction.

By doing more to promote pleasure reading, Mesquite looked to create lifetime readers, not “school readers” who read only for academic purposes and largely ignore books after graduation.

“We believe that the 21st century library is about learning. Since reading is a fundamental skill for learning, we want to provide reading materials in every format that is available for our students,” Director of Library Services Mary Woodard has noted.

FINDING THE RIGHT PARTNER FOR SUCCESS

Mesquite chose OverDrive as its partner in providing popular digital titles for two primary reasons:

CATALOG
Mesquite can choose from an unrivaled catalog of more than 2 million eBook, audiobook and streaming video titles spanning all subjects, genres and levels to meet all its reading and learning needs. This includes the hugely popular Hunger Games, Maze Runner, Divergent, Harry Potter and Diary of a Wimpy Kid series.

EXPERIENCE AND FAMILIARITY
As the trusted partner of more than 14,000 districts and schools worldwide, OverDrive also serves more than 90 percent of U.S. public libraries, including the Mesquite Public Library. This means students can seamlessly continue their digital reading even after they’re done with school.
OTHER BENEFITS OF THE SERVICE INCLUDE:

• Content is available on all major devices, including laptops, eReaders, tablets and smartphones. This is critical for a district like Mesquite which provides students access to a mixture of technology and also wants them to be able to leverage their personal devices for reading.

• Students and staff can download titles for convenient offline use anytime, anywhere. This eliminates a barrier to reading for students without a home internet connection.

• Mesquite’s digital collection is accessed through an easy-to-use, customized website that’s available 24/7/365 via the industry’s leading app or the browser-based OverDrive Read and OverDrive Listen, which require no software or downloads.

Mesquite’s OverDrive-powered digital library went live in November 2010. It was the first of its kind for a North Texas school district.

“IT’S SO EASY FOR THEM TO GET A BOOK”

Usage of Mesquite’s digital library has grown steadily, reaching more than 75,000 checkouts during the 2015-2016 school year. The goal is for 100,000 in 2016-2017.

“It’s so easy for them to get a book,” Swartz said of the increased access to recreational reading students now enjoy.

The district’s digital collection has also continued to expand, now at more than 7,500 eBooks and audiobooks. Titles are categorized as appropriate for elementary, middle or high school audiences – or a mixture of the three – and are searchable by ATOS Level, Lexile Measure and other reading metrics to ensure the right books are getting to the right students.

CLASSROOM USE

Swartz has started to make digital versions of ELA selections available to give students a choice on their preferred reading format. This has included Lord of the Flies, To Kill a Mockingbird and The Adventures of Tom Sawyer.

Students are also encouraged to use titles from the digital library during sustained silent reading periods.

ELL

Mesquite serves a large Hispanic population, with almost every elementary campus bilingual. To meet the reading and learning needs of these students, Swartz maintains a strong Spanish-language digital offering, which she can curate into a special collection for convenient discovery. The district also takes advantage of the multilingual interface available for their OverDrive-powered website, which allows the digital library to be navigated in Spanish.

An additional resource to aid Mesquite’s ELL students are Read-Alongs, eBooks for developing learners featuring professionally recorded narration that plays while students read highlighted text.

“It really helps to be able to hear it,” Swartz said of Mesquite’s growing collection of hundreds of Read-Alongs.

SUPPORTING THE YOUNGEST READERS

Mesquite is currently undertaking an initiative that aims to have all students reading at grade level by third grade. Swartz has supported this effort by bolstering the district’s preK-2 digital collection, which is also featured prominently in a curated collection on the website.

“We really want to get reading in the hands of the little ones, in every format and every way we can,” she said.