Bedford’s Challenge: Evolve to Remain Competitive

Located along Michigan’s southern border with Ohio, the Bedford Public Schools (BPS) serve 4,500 PreK-12 students across five buildings. The district has been recognized as a National Community School of Excellence, and regularly outpaces county and state test score averages.

BPS recognized several years ago the need to evolve in order to remain competitive in the ever-changing educational landscape, said Edward Manuszak, assistant superintendent of instructional and student services. To best prepare students for the future workforce, the district would refocus on developing critically thinking problem solvers who can communicate effectively.

“It's a cultural change we've gone through,” Manuszak said.

The district at that time was in the third year of a 1:1 Chromebook program roll out. All students in grades 3-12 are expected to have a device by the end of the 2017-2018 school year.

With these new learning tools being put in place, BPS then sought a digital content provider that could offer titles aligned to the district’s curriculum. The first area of focus would be full-length digital titles to complement textbooks as part of a K-12 English language arts adoption, the district’s first in 15 years.

Solution: Digital Curriculum to Complement ELA Adoption

BPS selected OverDrive as its digital content provider in spring 2015. This crucial decision was based on four key factors:

Top content from highest-quality publishers – OverDrive offers a PreK-12 catalog of millions of premium titles from 5,000+ publishers to support curriculum and instructional goals. Available formats are eBooks, audiobooks and streaming video. Areas of focus include literacy engagement; informational and literary nonfiction; novel sets and classroom reads; professional development; and textbooks and supplemental curriculum.

Manuszak said OverDrive’s selection of titles to meet BPS students’ and teachers’ needs, including for the ELA adoption at the forefront, is “excellent.”

“We want to provide as rich of a literary experience as possible,” he said.
**Cost-effective district/school model** – OverDrive titles are accessed via a district or school-wide website, reducing the number of copies that need to be purchased, and are retained year after year throughout the adoption cycle.

Manuszak said he also appreciates that digital content will never wear out from use and can never be lost or stolen.

**Ease of use and device compatibility** – Districts and schools’ OverDrive digital content is placed on an easy-to-use, customized website that’s available to students and educators 24/7/365. Titles are compatible with all major devices, including iPhone, iPad, NOOK, Android, Kindle and Chromebook, and can be used online or offline.

“It was very clear early on that OverDrive has been doing this for quite some time, and really understands the difference between just providing digital content and having students actually interact with digital content,” Manuszak said.

**Expert support for deep integration and implementation** – OverDrive curriculum implementation specialists work hand-in-hand with districts and schools to create a combination of titles tailored to meet their unique priorities and resources. Educators are provided comprehensive training resources to ensure they’re realizing the full benefits of the service, and dedicated account specialists are always available to answer questions or work solutions to everyday issues.

“OverDrive, in my opinion, truly gets it,” Manuszak said.

**Their Results: “We’ve been exceptionally pleased”**

BPS leaders worked closely with OverDrive to launch the service for the 2015-2016 school year. This included extensive collaboration with their OverDrive curriculum implementation specialist to choose the right titles and an on-site visit from the OverDrive team to train educators to use the platform.

Manuszak said it was easy to see that OverDrive “lives and breathes” digital content in districts and schools.

“It really went quite easily for us,” he said of the implementation process. “We’ve been exceptionally pleased with the support OverDrive’s provided our district.”

BPS went live with their OverDrive service in August 2015. By October, the district’s OverDrive-powered website offered a growing list of more than 600 recreational and educational titles available to students and teachers anytime, anywhere.

“Teachers have commented to use that now that they’re in an environment where it’s digital and it’s 1:1, they don’t understand how they used to do their jobs,” Manuszak said. “This is something that doesn’t come along very often.”

Looking forward, Manuszak said English language arts is just the start of the district’s shift to digital in the curriculum. He foresees BPS eventually leveraging digital across all subject areas, as well as continuing to build the district’s digital library and professional development resources.

“Do I see this OverDrive partnership continuing? 100 percent. Do I see it expanding? Absolutely,” he said. “Really, the sky’s the limit for us.”