ABC-CLIO’s Online Databases Make the Grade at Tech-Savvy Challenger Middle School

SITUATION

Challenger Middle School in Colorado Springs, CO, is within high-performing Academy District 20 and is part of a strand called Schools of Innovative Learning and Technology, which comprises an elementary school, a middle school, and a high school. These schools’ mission is to maintain a strong focus on building 21st-century learning skills using technology. In addition, there is a major focus on reading skills within various content areas.

Owing to the fairly affluent community, a large portion of which is military families, the student body at Challenger is relatively tech-savvy. The district encourages the use of personal devices such as iPads via a dedicated wireless network.

Challenge: Staying at the Forefront with 21st-Century Learning and Technology

Considering the technical resources available, a community that expects an exemplary education for its students, and an education team that works collaboratively, Challenger needed leading-edge, high-quality resources that met and exceeded all of these requirements. Additionally, Dianna Fricke, the librarian at Challenger, wanted to offer students an array of resources that included an online database rather than traditional textbooks. However, Fricke had a limited budget, and she was adamant that the resources be accessible, not overwhelming or intimidating.

SOLUTION

ABC-CLIO Solutions addressed all of Challenger’s resource needs across grade levels. Fricke notes that incorporating ABC-CLIO databases into the curriculum had two distinct benefits: the number of resources the school needed to buy was significantly reduced, and gaps in topical coverage were filled at each of the three grade levels.

BENEFITS TO SIXTH GRADERS

At the sixth-grade level, there had been frustrations with a national parks research project that required students to develop a presentation for either a board of directors or the visitor center. As previously used resources did not have the required information, sixth graders had difficulty finding data on significant geological features or obscure parks they had selected as topics of research. Within the ABC-CLIO databases, kids were delighted to quickly find the Channel Islands National Park and the Dry Tortugas National Park. Since the sixth graders found the databases so easy to use, Solutions therefore significantly broadened students’ options for researching topics of student interest.

BENEFITS TO SEVENTH GRADERS

Replacing Textbooks

When librarian Fricke showed the social studies department chair the database features and the teacher tools, he decided to work with the seventh-grade social studies teachers to develop the curriculum to allow for use of the databases exclusively in place of a textbook. This was the first time this had been attempted. The teachers found the ability to post links for the students by class period extremely useful and discovered that the databases were comprehensive enough for completing their own research before posting the lessons for the students on Moodle.

World Religions Unit

Recently, the seventh graders at Challenger were tasked with conducting research for a world religions unit. Between the ABC-CLIO World Geography and World Religions databases, the students found what they needed to complete their projects.
BENEFITS TO SEVENTH GRADERS (cont’d)
Social Studies and Language Arts
The seventh-grade social studies and language arts teacher uses ABC-CLIO Solutions in both classes for research, and she loves it. When the students are shown how to find information or are given a specific set of resources to find, they quickly grasp how to effectively use the database.

BENEFITS TO EIGHTH GRADERS
National History Day and Primary and Secondary Sources
An eighth-grade social studies teacher at Challenger Middle School was especially impressed with the primary sources within the databases. With the primary and secondary sources in ABC-CLIO databases, she was able to make the proper resources easily available to all students. She was previously unable to do so, which posed a recurring problem, especially for big research events such as National History Day.

Biographical Research Project
Challenger eighth-graders are also required to complete a biographical research project on a person who was influential in the 20th century. ABC-CLIO Solutions helped these students to identify key influences in a historical figure’s life direction or accomplishments, to reflect on these events in a journal entry or letter, and to write an obituary whether or not that figure was still alive.

American History and American Inventions
When students are working on projects regarding American inventions significant to American history, the Solutions databases allow students to easily see the relationship of historical information to various other topics—a benefit librarian Fricke finds especially valuable. For instance, the entry on barbed wire enables students to link directly to information on cowboys and ranching in American history.

ADDITIONAL CURRICULAR AREAS
Language Arts Poetry Project
ABC-CLIO databases are also used to great advantage in additional curricular areas such as language arts for the eighth grade. For a poetry project, students must choose a social commentary poem and learn about the poet as well as the historical context of the poem. For example, students used ABC-CLIO databases to learn about the event that inspired the poem “The Ballad of Birmingham.” The databases are also used extensively for a project about Edgar Allan Poe. The students report that they appreciate having all the information they need for their poetry projects in one place and that the database supplies the citation, while the teachers like the fact that MLA is used and the students are able to provide proper form.

Reading in the Content Areas
As a result of the district’s identification of reading as a key skill, Challenger has a “Reading in the Content Areas” program. In science, the databases supply reading for science in content areas on topics such as endangered species and environmental issues.

Forensic Research
Fricke is also the forensics coach, and students use the Issues: Understanding Controversy and Society database in forensics to collect their files when preparing for an extemporaneous speaking event. The topics and the overview articles are ideally suited for this purpose, as are the perspectives.
ENHANCING CRITICAL THINKING AND ANALYSIS

Because ABC-CLIO databases are so easy to use, students are able to truly engage in exploring their topics of interest, developing essential questions and making connections between complex issues and historical facts. In addition, the ubiquitous availability of the databases via personal devices helps students to build invaluable technology skills. The databases have become key to the district’s 21st-century skills and technology initiative.

THE FUTURE

While ABC-CLIO Solutions were purchased specifically for teaching social studies at Challenger, librarian Fricke hopes that as other educators see the benefit of the databases through constant teamwork and collaboration, ABC-CLIO Solutions will be integrated throughout the curriculum at Challenger and replace their outdated textbooks.

Quick Facts

Challenger Middle School

- Academy District 20’s original middle school
- A one-to-one iPad initiative gives every student his or her own district-provided iPad through which instruction is delivered
- The school has a long history of excellence in academics, athletics, and activities and is consistently thought of as one of the best middle schools in the state

Primary Objective:

“To educate every student in a safe and nurturing environment and to provide comprehensive, challenging curricular and extracurricular opportunities that meet the unique needs of every individual by expanding interests, enhancing abilities, and equipping every student with the knowledge, skills, and character essential to being a responsible citizen of our community, our nation, and the world”

TAG Program:

Challenger Middle School offers Talented and Gifted (TAG) elective classes, enrichment, and co-curricular opportunities for each grade level (sixth, seventh, and eighth)

ABC-CLIO Databases Used:

- American History
- American Government
- World History: Ancient and Medieval Eras
- Issues: Understanding Controversy and Society
- World at War: Understanding Conflict and Society

DISTRICT LEADER

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