ABC-CLIO’s Online Databases: Digital Resources Save Money and Enhance Learning at Spring Branch ISD

**SITUATION**

Spring Branch Independent School District, located just outside of Houston, Texas, is faced with the same budget cuts as are most districts across the country, making it difficult to provide quality resources and up-to-date textbooks for its students. As a way to save and leverage money in the district budget, JoAnn Conlon, Director of Innovative Resource Media Systems, has initiated a program to replace textbooks with digital resources.

**Challenge: Making the Case for Digital**

To implement the change from print to digital resources, Conlon first needed to demonstrate to her colleagues and district leaders that digital offered more value to students and teachers.

**SOLUTION**

With her years of working and teaching with ABC-CLIO databases, she found them to be “a revelation” because they were perfectly positioned to replace print textbooks. Furthermore, they feature many advantages over textbooks: not only are they less expensive, but they are also constantly updated, and they offer enhanced student engagement through video, audio, and visual, and multimedia content.

To ensure that teachers and administration would embrace and use the new collection of digital resources, she spoke with major constituents such as the associate superintendent, executive directors, interdisciplinary coaches, librarians, and others who could help influence behavior change. SBISD had the foresight to include the district librarian in textbook meetings, so Conlon was able to present her ideas there.

She showcased the ease of navigation, how the content is aligned to SBISD’s standards, and how teachers can develop lesson plans based on standards as well as skill sets. She explained that these are excellent as supplemental resources and as affordable textbook replacements. Furthermore, they would give students important tools for building research and critical thinking skills.

Jim Leifer, the instructional lead for secondary social studies, immediately began to develop a program to replace social studies textbooks. Dr. Jennifer Blaine, the associate superintendent of curriculum and instruction, was so strongly convinced of the databases’ potential to transform learning that she requested that Jim Leifer and JoAnn Conlon work together on effectively integrating databases across the entire district.
**Challenge: Implementation**

To continue the successful integration of ABC-CLIO’s online databases, increased awareness of the databases was required throughout the district and in other curriculum areas beyond social studies. Conlon noted that behavioral change in students and teachers was the key issue and that it would be important to develop a program to reinforce the expectation that the databases would be used by students and staff.

**SOLUTION**

Conlon, Liefer, and Blaine spread enthusiasm through the district and beyond the social studies curriculum. Conlon reviewed the databases and showed how they would meet students’ needs. She emphasized that existing lesson plans need not be rewritten—only the content delivery method would change. An expert trainer was available to assist teachers on the system for three months. ABC-CLIO Solutions became resources for the program of online devices provided for student collaborative work. Most notably, the English Language Arts department also adopted the databases into their curriculum.

**ENHANCING CRITICAL THINKING AND ANALYSIS: WEB LITERACY**

Conlon doesn’t use the terms “21st-century skills,” “information literacy,” or “library,” but instead discusses web literacy and the Learning Commons. She emphasizes that educators need to “speak their language” for effective communication between students and educators as well as among educators themselves. She has leveraged the Learning Commons concept to create a district-wide blended learning model with ABC-CLIO databases as the core resource for social studies.

**EVALUATING SUCCESS**

Conlon was surprised at how quickly database use increased after “marketing” the ABC-CLIO databases within the district. By the end of the semester, the databases had 35,000 users. The databases had been in the district for a while, but she found that she had needed to increase awareness of the resources the Library Learning Commons provided.

**THE FUTURE**

Conlon notes that with budget cuts, textbook adoption will continue to be a controversial issue in the next several years. Districts are striving to replace or extend the life of textbooks, to which a large part of school district budgets often go. She feels there are better ways to use that money. This year, her district is concentrating on increasing the number of devices available to students and teachers. The district has a five-year strategy and the Learning Commons is part of that strategy and vision.
### Quick Facts

**Spring Branch ISD**
- District schools: 27 elementary schools, 9 middle schools, and 8 high schools
- Student population: 32,000

**Library Mission:** "To inspire in every child: excellence, limitless curiosity, collaborative spirit, and moral compass in reaching collective greatness"

**ABC-CLIO Databases Used**
- American History
- American Government
- World History: Ancient and Medieval Eras
- Issues: Understanding Controversy and Society
- World Geography: Understanding a Changing World
- World at War: Understanding Conflict and Society

**DISTRICT LEADER**
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