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RACHEL TASSLER
Reading Specialist,
Tomahawk Middle School, Wisconsin

In the lush and forested town of Tomahawk, Wisconsin – where so many people come to spend summer vacations – a top-notch school district bustles with activity as teachers and administrators diligently work to incorporate a new curriculum and lesson plans in order to teach to the new state standards.

This ‘unique’ district is just one among many in the state juggling staff and resources to ensure they’re using the right materials as they teach the newly aligned curriculum. As a Cooperative Educational Services Agency (CESA 7) district (see box, page 2), Tomahawk uses a tool called Curriculum Companion along with Follett’s Titlewave™ to successfully implement the new curriculum.

(Curriculum Companion is an online teacher resource for integrating technology into the Open Court-, Houghton Mifflin-, McDougal Littell- and Holt-adopted curriculum for English Language Arts.)
“Districts do not have the time to unpack all of the standards and do all of the work,” said Carole Witt Stark, a national languages arts consultant with CESA 7. “Curriculum Companion will do the unpacking for them, which then gives them time to do the other, more important work.”

CHALLENGE: Diving Into the Unknown Takes Time and a Lot of Learning

As staff at Tomahawk quickly learned, there was a lot of ‘other work’ to accomplish in a short amount of time. As they integrated the new curriculum—even with the help of the agency and the new technology—they realized the endeavor would take time and patience.

"This was a brand-new curriculum for us," said Rachel Tassler, Reading Coach at Tomahawk Middle School. "We had never taught some of these themes and genres at these grade levels." Even though the district began implementing the new curriculum more than 18 months ago, Rachel pointed out how learning by staff continued to evolve with each passing month. But it also changed the way students learn as well.

As Peg Billing, the Library Media Instructional Technology Coordinator for the district, explains, “It’s totally changing what the kids are reading in K-12. It’s changing the focus of how they write. It’s changing the focus of what they’re doing in the classroom. It’s very much changed the look of learning in the classroom.”

Increasingly, teachers turned to Billing for help finding resources aligned to the new themes. "There were so many requests,” Billing said. “They would ask ‘What do you have on mythology? I need this, I need this, and I need this.’"

SOLUTION: Putting the Power of Titlewave to Work

Luckily, Tomahawk already had a tool in place to help them quickly find the resources they needed, which was Titlewave. As teachers flooded Billing with

WHAT IS CESA?

Cooperative Educational Service Agencies — better known as CESAs — assist school districts through in-service training, shared services, and provides a link between the Department of Public Instruction and local districts.

In Wisconsin, CESA 7 has 193 districts using Curriculum Companion. Beginning this school year, the Wisconsin Student Assessment System will be based on the Common Core State Standards.

Through collaborative partnership, CESA 7:

- Provides leadership for teaching and learning
- Promotes excellence in professional practice
- Delivers supportive services for students and those who serve them
- Assists school districts in achieving their missions and goals
requests and concerns, she knew she could harness the power of Titlewave and they would easily be able to identify curriculum-aligned resources.

With more than one million education-focused titles from 48 thousand publishers, Titlewave makes it easy to search by title and/or author, FLR#, or ISBN. It also makes it easy to combine or separate book, ebook, and audiovisual searches, lists, and orders.

“As a teacher and as a library media specialist, it is a challenge to try to provide the resources needed to support the new curriculum, but using Titlewave was very, very, very helpful,” said Billing.

Teamwork and a shared interest in student success helped Tomahawk build the lists of books and digital content aligned to each theme and genre in the new standards. CESA 7 and Follett’s Content Research and Alignment Team worked together to identify and gather the resources needed by Tomahawk. Using Titlewave, Tomahawk was able to streamline the process of alignment, which not only saved time but assured staff the resources they chose truly fit their needs. As Tomahawk moved further into their new curriculum with CESA 7’s help, Billing turned to her Follett account manager, Bob Whitbeck, for help in making sure the school had the lists they needed to work quickly in Curriculum Companion.

“It’s important to note that as Companion evolves over time, so, too, do the lists in Titlewave,” said Whitbeck. "Our content alignment team is always adding new titles, evaluating new titles coming in from publishers, and updating our lists."

As Rachel Tassler, the reading specialist, pointed out, the district’s pre-Titlewave days meant hours of searching—and not always finding what she needed. “I would spend hours looking through Amazon or Barnes & Noble, or talking to my library media specialist, or talking to other teachers I know. It was really time-consuming.” But a quick introduction to Titlewave turned her into a devotee, as she immediately had an efficient way

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to find the tools she needed to help her striving readers.

"Peg, our library media specialist, showed us how to use Titlewave with Curriculum Companion. She showed us how to use Titlewave to find books with similar themes to order for the Companion use." Rachel and other teachers at Tomahawk quickly fell in love with Titlewave’s Curriculum Tags®, which helps them discover new content or see how a book they already have in the library aligns with their new curriculum.

Dr. Margarete Ronnett, Director of Classroom Products at Follett, explained how helpful Curriculum Tags have become since the inception of recent standards. "Beyond helping teachers find new content by Lexile, author, or theme, or to see how titles they have align with their curriculum, a key aspect of Curriculum Tags is that they go beyond the “what” of content and inform educators HOW books can be used instructionally – what skills they support,” said Ronnett. "One of the big sea changes with the CCSS is the need to develop skills, not just cover content, and so many of our Tags do that: they identify how titles can be used to support skill development. And many titles carry multiple tags, so teachers can see several applications of a given title. No one else in the industry offers this, so truly a unique tool that Follett provides to teachers and librarians."

“I love that the curriculum tags are there! You can look by Lexile; you can look by theme; you can look by author. I love how they have those there for you, and it’s really easy to use,” Rachel said. As Tassler pointed out, time is a sparse commodity, and Titlewave allows her to spend more time where she should—on students. “Titlewave allows me more time to teach my students because I don’t have to go digging for the resources; they’ve done it for me.”

Jeff Dickert, the agency administrator with CESA 7, said schools using Titlewave enjoy the confidence in knowing materials are correctly aligned and appropriate for each standard. “Titlewave has everything set for them if they so choose to go into it and use what’s already been selected by experts from Follett,” said Dickert.

“Follett has done a masterful job of aligning their resources to the new Common Core and state standards. Teachers know that when I use something of Follett’s, it’s quality; it’s been vetted.”

JEFF DICKERT
Agency Administrator, CESA 7
RESULTS: Bringing Confidence and Efficiency to Standards-Based Alignment

The district continues to learn the curriculum and implement the standards using Titlewave and Curriculum Tags. As a new school year begins, Billing and the teachers at Tomahawk feel confident they have the language arts resources they need and all are accurately aligned to the state of Wisconsin’s new standards.

"I really don’t know what we would have done or where we would be now if we had not had Titlewave when this began," said Billing. "Titlewave gave us a place to start and got us going in the right direction, so we could really find the materials best suited for the needs of each grade level. Otherwise, it would have been an incredibly overwhelming task. Back then, the teachers were befuddled with the enormity of the new curriculum, but I knew we had Titlewave. Making lists was taking over my job until we put Titlewave to work."