

Innovative State Uses SelectText to Create High-Quality Curricula



THE CHALLENGE

Schools across the country strive to put the best materials and resources into the hands of their students. But it's often difficult to find readily available, high-quality curricula that fully align to a state's unique standards.

That's exactly the problem the state of Louisiana faced. Here's a look inside how Louisiana's Department of Education worked with teachers and educational professionals to develop their own curricula and made them available as open education resources (OERs) to their districts as well as to educators throughout the country.

TRADITIONAL CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT CHALLENGES

The Louisiana Department of Education began their search for well-rounded standards-based curricula by turning to publishers in the traditional vendor marketplace. But when they couldn't find lessons that fit the specific needs of their students, they began to explore alternatives.

Louisiana discovered that they could develop their own high-quality curricula, providing their teachers with the flexibility to tailor their lessons to the needs of their students, while ensuring alignment with the Louisiana state standards. It would also enable them to utilize important supporting materials like newspaper articles, web content and blog articles, which often aren't available through traditional models.

Louisiana decided to proceed with developing their own customized curricula, now known as the ELA Guidebooks. These Guidebooks were composed – in most cases – of five self-contained units consisting of lesson plans, whole works and supplementary text sets. “[They’re] made for teachers, by teachers [and] are openly licensed, which means they can be adapted, used, [and] redistributed in any context teachers want,” explains Whitney Whealdon, Director of Academic Content at the Louisiana Department of Education. “Often, teachers run into issues, where they feel like they should stick with the exact language written in the textbook, but the Guidebooks provide that open opportunity to adapt and make it appropriate for the students in their classroom.”

OPEN EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES: PRACTICAL APPLICATION CHALLENGES

For the teachers and districts, however, adopting the Guidebooks presented some challenges. In their first iteration, the Department of Education provided only the list of outside readings with links to locations on the web where the content could be found. But many of the links became stale within a short period of time, so teachers

“We firmly believe that all students, no matter what zip code they are born in, are capable of greatness, and we really want to ensure we are providing the right resources so students can realize their potential.”

Whitney Whealdon
Director of Academic Content at the
Louisiana Department of Education

or districts had to spend time searching for the specified readings and ensuring that they aligned with the organization of the lesson plan. Once the teacher or district was confident they had located the appropriate materials, they then needed to obtain permission to copy third-party materials for distribution to students.

"In a traditional setting, a teacher would have a textbook with all of the texts in one place. In the nontraditional, innovative setting that we're trying to push across the state of Louisiana, teachers might be creating their own materials or have access to openly licensed materials like the Guidebooks, but they don't necessarily have the texts in one place," explains Whealdon. "While it looks easier, sometimes it was more [of a] burden on the teacher." The difficulty in maintaining up-to-date links and identifying and seeking appropriate permission for the use of third-party texts created a significant barrier to the adoption of the curriculum.

THE SOLUTION

Louisiana's solution was to deliver lesson materials through professionally printed unit readers – with all the texts centrally located in a single place and fully cleared for use in their classrooms. This new curriculum was far easier for teachers and districts to quickly adopt and put into their classrooms.

"It allows for real diversity of formats in the classroom," Whealdon points out. "The unit readers open up the opportunity to bring more newspapers, online articles and blog posts that students can respond and react to in the classroom."

By partnering with Copyright Clearance Center (CCC) and using CCC's SelectText service, Louisiana was able to relieve educators of the burden of tracking down all of their readings and worrying about copyright permissions – affordably. And thanks to CCC's course materials partner, XanEdu, Louisiana was able to deliver professionally printed unit readers directly to teachers' classrooms. There were no more hoops to jump through. All teachers had to do was teach. By combining the ease of the traditional approach with the innovation of the new, more student-focused approach, SelectText enables teachers to easily incorporate high-value, copyright-compliant published content (such as book excerpts, magazine and newspaper articles, web pages and more) into their lessons. Making these readings readily available – and making it easy to get permissions to use them – enables teachers to provide students the opportunity to learn from some of the finest authors, storytellers and historians, without having to jump through hoops to make it possible.

THE RESULTS

With the ELA Guidebooks 2.0, teachers have gone from thinking, "what am I going to teach?" to "how am I going to teach this in a more effective way, so all students achieve the desired goals from that curriculum?"

As Louisiana watches this program grow and succeed, they see a bright future ahead for the Guidebooks. In fact, their hard work is now helping students – and educators – across the United States.

"A majority of our districts in Louisiana are using these materials in some form. In some cases, it might be in a certain set of grade levels or across K-12," says Whealdon. "We're also seeing that these materials are being used outside Louisiana as well. We've heard of implementations in Tennessee, New York, Minnesota, Ohio, North Carolina and some other states."

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