Independence Unified School District 446 Chooses "Living Curriculum"

The transition from one set of curriculum standards to another is never a simple task. As Independence Unified School District 446 came to understand, such a transition would be a meticulous, time-consuming effort to complete, necessitated by the Kansas State Department of Education's release of the Kansas College and Career Ready Standards (KCCRS). It was clear to Kellie Puderbaugh, Director of Learning Services for Independence USD 446, this transition called for a thorough and detailed look at the district's current curriculum. **"Adopting the KCCRS meant our curriculum needed to become fully realigned, both horizontally and vertically."**

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>
> — Kellie Puderbaugh,
> Director of Learning Services,
> Independence Unified School District 446

It had also become clear to Kellie that Independence needed to find a way to alleviate the pressure classroom teachers were feeling in the face of having to rework their curriculum. **"Our teachers were expressing their appreciation for what a curriculum development tool could do to assist in the adoption of the new Kansas standards."**

The Solution

To Kellie, the solution Independence needed was technologically based. After researching and evaluating available solutions, the district adopted BuildYourOwnCurriculum (BYOC) in June 2012.

"BuildYourOwnCurriculum has been an incredible help in addressing our curriculum goals. We knew, if implemented the right way, BYOC had the potential to not only complete our goals at the district level, but create more options and opportunities for our classroom teachers," said Puderbaugh.

Teacher Buy-in

According to Kellie, Independence had never successfully and consistently used a technology platform to develop and manage their curriculum. It came as no surprise to her that some staff members were a little skeptical of what a good program could add to the curriculum development process. As she hoped, the district's experience with BYOC has been a 'user-friendly' one. **"The technology is impressive. Just by exploring BYOC, you can easily figure out what to do and how to do it. The program itself is incredibly logical."**

"I have had many teachers comment on BYOC's organized structure, report generation and search capabilities, but what caught their immediate attention was how the curriculum they built would directly connect to the program's lesson-planning tool."

The integrated lesson planning tool within BYOC allows teachers to plan, design and publish lesson plans through an

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The Framework for K-12 Success

Independence Unified School District 446

Independence, Kansas

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organized structure that automatically aligns lesson content with defined learning targets.

Another feature that has become popular and frequently utilized by Independence's teaching staff is BYOC's cross-district sharing tool. BYOC allows users to access and download curriculum from other districts anywhere in the country who are using the program.

"Our teachers are getting more and more comfortable using this feature. They have gone out and found methods and objectives from districts across the country, as well as districts here in Kansas that are in the same place as us," said Kellie. "Our thought process behind utilizing the district-sharing feature is to not reinvent the wheel, but rather to see what methods are out there and what's working," Kellie explained.

Implementing for Success

Independence began their BYOC implementation with a full day of professional development in August 2012. According to Kellie, the entire teaching staff of over 140 educators started training immediately. **"We decided to all jump in as a district – as they say, we're all in this together, "**said Kellie.

Teacher leaders and groups were then created to lead discussions such as the differences between learning targets and standards. **"We spent a lot of time deconstructing standards and by January [2013], our teachers were chomping at the bit to start writing curriculum in BYOC."**

"As our teachers worked to develop their courses in BYOC, we still kept the curriculum discussions going by using half-days and collaboration time to engage in vertical and interdepartmental conversations. We also created vertical articulation teams comprised of teacher leaders to discuss the transition from one grade level to the next."

According to Kellie, Independence's main goal in the implementation was 'building in the time to work.' **"We want our teachers to take the time they need to explore and work with the program and the newly adopted standards. The district provided teachers with time throughout the summer of 2013 to build curriculum in BYOC. We're taking it one step at a time**

and approaching this process thoughtfully to ensure quality rather than quantity."

"Without a doubt, this implementation is a long process, but it is necessary. We may only be in the beginning stages, but our teachers can see where BYOC is taking us. I often hear them say 'this is a lot of work, but this is good stuff'."

Reaping the Benefits

Despite the long road ahead, Kellie says Independence is progressing at a great pace**. "We plan to have our English Language Arts and Math curriculum fully completed by the end of next year [2014]. Once these two areas are completed, we will explore the possibility of adding BYOC's assessment piece – BuildYourOwnAssessment [BYOA]."**

BuildYourOwnAssessment is an assessment development tool used to define, manage and analyze common assessments, as well as support the alignment of assessments to state and national standards. **"BYOC's assessment connection with BYOA is impressive. Both BYOC and BYOA create a complete circle – learning targets and standards are consistently created, updated and assessed. This is exactly what we hope to achieve with our curriculum."**

"Overall, I am very satisfied with our implementation of BYOC. Without a doubt, any fears that our teachers may have had toward BYOC have dissipated. BYOC was brought to our attention at the right time – it supports our curriculum goals and our transition from old to new standards."

When asked how she would describe BuildYourOwnCurriclum to other districts in Kansas, Kellie replied, **"To put it simply, BYOC is an online curriculum warehouse. It provides a way for districts to organize and align curriculum to standards that are constantly changing."**

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