

CK-12 Foundation Blog

Superintendent Voice: How CK-12 Helped Make Our Switch To OER A Success

January 5, 2016



Gary Lilly has served as the Director of Schools for Bristol Tennessee City Schools for the past seven years. He has held a variety of roles with the system, including parent involvement coordinator, curriculum specialist, technology coordinator, principal, and attendance and transportation director. The district has also been recognized as one of six #GoOpen Ambassador Districts by the United States Department of Education for their work with Open Educational Resources.

Bristol Tennessee City Schools has just over 4,000 students. In 2015, we completed a phased rollout of Dell laptop computers to every student in grades 4 – 12. This allows teachers to personalize learning for students with engaging assignments that emphasize anytime/anywhere learning. However, that opportunity comes at a significant cost.

To help pay for this “Digital Conversion,” we are using funds traditionally earmarked for textbooks. Of course, teachers and students still need resources. To meet those needs, we are relying on the curation and development of Open Educational Resources (OER) from CK-12 Foundation. In addition to saving money, the move allows us to be more agile in addressing shifting content standards, a new state accountability and assessment system, and newly approved instructional paths.

One recent example involves the decision to change our approach to teaching math at the high school level. Rather than teaching math as disparate disciplines, such as algebra, geometry, trigonometry, and analysis, districts now have the option to create integrated mathematics courses, which integrates topics and strands each year. Overwhelmingly, our district’s math teachers felt the integrated curricula was a superior option to pursue.

The change required different instructional resources to the traditional math textbooks that the district had been using. Unfortunately, no funds were available to purchase new textbooks as most of those resources had been shifted to purchase laptops for the digital conversion.

Teachers were excited about the change but a bit anxious about what it would mean instructionally. They needed a resource that would provide direction, yet be flexible enough to change as their understanding of the approach changed, as well as in response to student needs.

We partnered with the leadership of the Niswonger Foundation, to create an [Integrated Math FlexBook®](#) an OER resource using the freely available framework and tools provided by CK12.org.



Development Process

With oversight from Dr. Richard Kitzmiller, the Niswonger Foundation's Director of Programs, and Dr. Annette Tudor, the district's Curriculum Supervisor, a team was created to work on the FlexBook®, including district math teachers, a curriculum specialist, and Dr. Ryan Nivens, a well-respected mathematics professor from the nearby East Tennessee State University. Dr. Nivens agreed to participate because he found the initiative intriguing. "I like to see such innovation coming from the teachers themselves, rather than something pushed down from the state administration. My background was from a curriculum research center, which made this project all the more compelling," noted Nivens.

"Creating the FlexBook® was like having a PLC on steroids," according to Scott Lamie, one of the district's virtual school teachers.

Dr. Kitzmiller helped assemble support for the work, remarking that, "As both a former superintendent and a math teacher, I was very interested in the project and enjoyed bringing participants together with different perspectives to maximize the usefulness of the finished product." Each member of the team added to the project based on their areas of expertise and insight. Dr. Nivens vetted chapters as they were created to ensure they were conceptually and pedagogically sound and consistent. Dr. Kitzmiller and others are pleased with their first Integrated Math FlexBook®. "The Niswonger Foundation is committed to scaling improvements in educational outcomes. The development of Open Educational Resources is a sound strategy to accomplish that and an efficient use of resources," Dr. Kitzmiller acknowledged.

CK-12 FlexBooks® have proved invaluable as teachers have embarked on their first year of integrated math instruction. While serving as a resource to plan instruction, it remains malleable, giving teachers the autonomy to use their professional judgment.

The team is now making plans to begin FlexBooks® for the second and third integrated math courses. We were thrilled to discover that CK12.org's developers had already done a lot of work toward that effort, which will dramatically decrease our own development time. We are very appreciative to have access to such a robust, no-cost platform, which is helping us revolutionize the educational opportunities available to our students. We applaud the many folks at CK12.org who make our jobs easier and educational results better. CK12.org is truly a partner in helping us engage, challenge, and inspire, our students.