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Education

# The transition to digital content: Selecting the right partner

*Case Study I*  
*St. Vrain Valley School District*



## Summary

Located north of Denver, the St. Vrain Valley School District is Colorado's eighth-largest school district, serving 30,000 PreK-12 students in 53 schools spread across 411 square miles. The district is a recognized leader in technology integration and innovative education, as demonstrated by its recent receipt of two significant awards from the U.S. Department of Education: a \$3.6 million "Investing in Innovation" grant in 2010 and a \$16.6 million "Race to the Top" grant in 2012.

St. Vrain had dabbled in digital content for years before instituting its 2013 "Learning Technology Plan," which

centers on the full implementation of a 1:1 device program by the end of the 2017-2018 school year. The district chose OverDrive over other vendors as its partner to provide the digital content to these new tools and students' and educators' personal devices.

The district invested \$727,000 in digital content for a multi-dimensional program: novel sets as part of an English language arts adoption for grades 6-12; middle and high school libraries to support literacy engagement; and professional development needs.

## Background & Challenges

For several years, St. Vrain had been experimenting with a variety of digital content options in the classroom and library. This included proactively purchasing textbooks with PDF versions (and some interactive features) and a "smattering" of titles – primarily eBooks, and some audiobooks – in each district library. The library offerings were "catch as catch can," dependent on each individual school's budget, interest, environment and available devices.

### Lack of consistency

"It was very, very spotty across the district," district Instructional Technology Coordinator Bud Hunt said of the lack of consistency of digital content between schools.

St. Vrain also faced a problem when it came to retaining its digital content. Should a school or department have funds to purchase devices, the content uploaded onto them would be lost when the lifecycle of the device was over. There was no plan – or money – to replace the content.

"Why invest as a district in digital content if you can't get it to the kids?" Hunt said of this "refresh" challenge.

### Seeking the "evergreen" solution

St. Vrain needed an "evergreen" solution that would allow for retention of the district's digital content regardless of the devices being used.

In 2013, the district instituted its "Learning Technology Plan," an ambitious 1:1 initiative aimed at providing all students with iPad® minis and Chromebook laptops by the end of the 2017-2018 school year. The overarching goal, St. Vrain Executive Director of Curriculum Kahle Charles said, is to help "close the digital divide with our students."

With the first district-wide device plan established and beginning to roll out, St. Vrain leaders then came to a popular impasse: How can we best deliver engaging digital content to our students and educators through these device pathways that are being built (while still leveraging students' and educators' personal devices)?

"To me, this is probably one of the biggest paradigm shifts I've seen in 31 years of being in education," Charles said of the move to digital content.

## Solution

In December 2013, St. Vrain began considering digital content providers to power its 1:1 initiative with popular and educational full-length texts.

Cleveland-based OverDrive, the sole digital-only company in contention, was ultimately chosen for its ability to meet the following needs:

### *Provide high-quality literature across the district for recreational and instructional needs*

OverDrive's PreK-12 catalog of more than 2 million titles from more than 5,000 publishers provides the breadth and depth of content St. Vrain required to support Common Core and Colorado Academic standards and the PARCC assessment while promoting 21st century skills to help students become better problem solvers, enhance creativity and boost collaboration. Available formats include eBooks, audiobooks, streaming video, periodicals and music. Areas of focus include literacy engagement; informational and literary nonfiction; novel sets and classroom reads; professional development; and textbooks and supplemental curriculum.

"In terms of topic of content, we've not yet run up against something that we've wanted but couldn't find," district Language Arts Coordinator Kerin McClure said of OverDrive's catalog.

### *Titles will last through length of digital novel set adoption cycle*

Since St. Vrain was utilizing English language arts adoption funds to finance its digital novel sets program for grades 6-12, the district needed to ensure these titles would remain available until at least the next adoption cycle. OverDrive was able to provide titles for this program that would be retained by the district year after year.

### *Ease of use*

The OverDrive app is the highest-rated eReading app for schools, and titles can also be read via its browser-based eReader, OverDrive Read®, which requires no software or downloads. One-click check out capability cuts down on steps to accessing titles, and the fact that many of the public libraries in the district already offered OverDrive meant that students, parents and teachers would already be familiar with the platform.

"It can be the best content in the world, but if we can't access it due to it being clunky, then kids and teachers won't use it," Charles said. "OverDrive offered a seamless solution."

*"Kids will choose school when they're not at school if there's a way for them to choose it."*

### *24/7/365 access for students and educators*

OverDrive-powered schools access their digital content from a custom-designed website that's always available. Hunt sees this anytime access as a strong tool to encourage students' reading and learning outside school walls.

"Kids will choose school when they're not at school if there's a way for them to choose it," he said.

### *Compatibility with all major devices*

OverDrive titles are compatible with all major devices, including iPhone®, iPad®, NOOK®, Android™, Kindle® and Chromebook™. With the 1:1 program incorporating a variety of devices – and students utilizing their own devices as the program continues to be rolled out – Hunt said having an agnostic solution removes barriers to digital content.

"The fact that a kid doesn't have to discriminate (between devices) and can get an eBook is great," he said.

## Conclusion

Leveraging OverDrive's cost-effective pricing models, St. Vrain utilized curriculum funds to invest \$727,000 for digital content to serve:

### English language arts in grades 6-12

With the assistance of an OverDrive educational content expert, district staff selected digital titles aligned to units of study. Three-hundred and fifty copies of 12 titles were purchased for each grade level, including *Island of the Blue Dolphins*, *Wonder*, *The Watsons Go to Birmingham – 1963*, *Animal Farm* and *Into Thin Air*.

### Middle and high school districtwide libraries

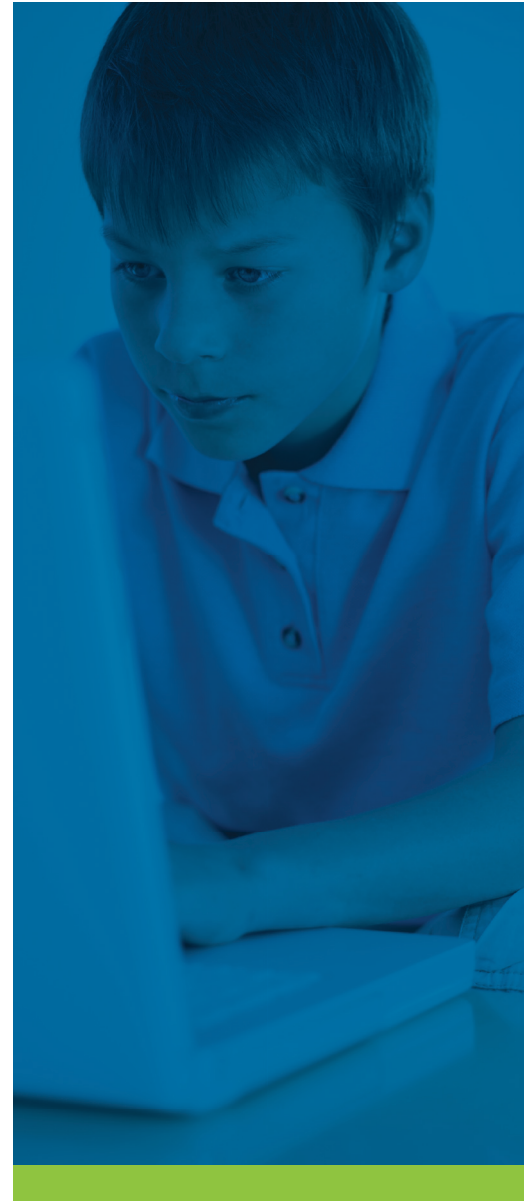
Utilizing recommendations from their OverDrive educational content expert based on national data and insight into the digital space, a district committee convened to select 5,300 titles (22,000 copies) tailored to meet St. Vrain's unique needs and resources. Many titles have both eBook and audiobook versions.

### Professional development

These resources were previously available only in a small library housed away from school facilities, which proved inconvenient for educators. Titles were selected to align with instructional goals, and can now be accessed by educators from any device, anywhere.

Although full implementation of its OverDrive service is ongoing, St. Vrain leaders said they're confident they made the right decision in a digital content partner for the present, and the future.

"It's not a project I'm worried about," Hunt said.



To learn about how St. Vrain implemented its OverDrive digital content service, **read Case Study II.**

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