

eBook Program Boosts Reading Rates, Relevancy of School Library

WILLIAMSVILLE, New York – Students at Heim Middle School (HMS) begin each day with a 20-minute independent reading session using eBooks on their 1:1 devices, a classroom program spearheaded by Library Media Specialist David Sala.

Sala said eBooks quickly became the preferred reading method for their convenience – students are never without their iPad or Chromebook – and the privacy they afford students who, for example, may be reading a title below grade level or that deals with a sensitive personal issue.

“There isn’t a lot of time where students are out of the classroom looking for a book, and they don’t have to worry about being embarrassed about what they’re reading,” he said.

HMS is part of the Williamsville Central School District, which serves more than 10,000 K-12 students across 13 schools and has consistently been ranked as one of the top districts in western New York. Sala and other district leaders began considering eReading options several years ago as eBooks and audiobooks grew in popularity.

“We knew that we wanted to continue to offer library services to our school community that they would find useful and relevant,” he said.

The district chose OverDrive as its digital content solution in 2011. Sala said the major factors in this decision were OverDrive’s universal device compatibility, including student-owned and 1:1; millions of titles available for K-12; and established support system, which serves more than 18,000 school partners across the globe.

Williamsville’s digital library now features more than 3,800 titles, with the focus on popular children’s and YA fiction. Sala said eBooks and audiobooks have been well received by the entire school community, as evident by students reading more and the enthusiasm shown by teachers for the learning opportunities they offer.

“It’s been a fabulous program for us,” he said.

Sala noted that making the shift to digital has also proven beneficial for the school library itself. He said librarians have become the go-to resource for questions about accessing eBooks and audiobooks and are the primary drivers behind what has become an extremely successful initiative.

“It’s really helped us be more relevant in the school community,” he said. “They’re thinking technology and the library together, which was exactly what we wanted to see happen.”

Looking forward, Sala said he’ll be helping lead an exploration into how else the district can incorporate digital content into the classroom and curriculum. Areas of immediate interest include digital novel sets and locally created content, he said.

