

Agencies team to build statewide K-12 eBook solution

Digital Library Consortium now available to all Wisconsin schools

The **Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction (DPI)** and **WiLS** teamed in 2014 to begin exploring a big idea: implementing a statewide eBook consortium for schools.



"To meet the needs of all learners, it takes away a lot of barriers by providing multiple venues of resources for students," DPI School Library Consultant Monica Treptow, who sits on the project's interim board, said of the importance of providing schools access to eBooks in addition to traditional print texts.

Three years of diligent research and collaborative discussion followed. This included extensive surveying of school media specialists from across Wisconsin, investigation into similar projects in other states and close review of potential providers.

A common piece of feedback received during this process was that many schools weren't currently offering eBooks because they simply lacked the start-up and ongoing funding. Cost-effective pricing would be a crucial component to the viability of the K-12 consortium.

"I think it's an equity question," WiLS Director Stef Morrill, an interim board member, said. "This is a big thing in our state; we have really small communities, and, frankly, poor communities. Some of these rural districts just can't afford the buy in to have their own digital collection of books. What we saw with the **Wisconsin Public Library Consortium (WPLC)** that was so powerful was that you were able to say, 'It doesn't matter what size library you are, you have access to this entire collection.' To be able to offer that same sense of equity to schools was a very high selling point."

This work would inform a "Think Tank" comprised of representatives from DPI, WiLS, the **Cooperative Educational Service Agencies (CESA)** Statewide Network and CESA Purchasing, school media specialists, curriculum and technology specialists and a school business official in its development of a structure for the **Wisconsin Schools Digital Library Consortium (WSDLC)**. Other key elements included:

- **To meet the reading and learning needs of all students**, there must be a diverse catalog of titles available for purchase
- **Since every school has a unique device situation**, the platform must be device agnostic
- **Because not every student has internet access at home**, there must be a download option for offline reading
- **Participating schools must have the ability** to supplement the Consortium collection with titles for their individual use

"We were able to get so much feedback from the school media specialists that we were able to build something they'd truly be interested in participating in," Morrill said.

THE WSDLC TAKES SHAPE

After careful review, the interim board selected **OverDrive Education** as the WSDLC provider in August 2017. The collection went live Jan. 1, 2018.

The WSDLC is self-supported through a membership fee of just \$1.50 per student. This grants member schools access to all purchased eBooks in the collection, either through a custom website, the OverDrive app or their own library catalog.

The WSDLC's opening day offering was chosen by the interim board, with ongoing selection eventually shifted to a member committee. Separated into grade-level sub-collections for preK-4, 5-8 and 9-12—members can sign up for any combination of the three—it focuses on newly published titles and features:

- Fiction and nonfiction
- Titles for pleasure reading, including popular authors and award winners
- Spanish language materials
- Culturally diverse materials
- Content from a variety of publishers
- High interest/low reading level content

School District of Tomahawk Library Media Instructional Technology Coordinator Peg Billing, an interim board member, noted that the powerful sharing dynamic of the WSDLC gives students expanded access to the books they want to read.



“If we’re going to prepare these kids for college and careers, we need to have these digital resources,” she said. “By doing a consortium collection, we have a much better chance of having what the kids are interested in available to use right away. It makes it much more appealing to kids to check it out and see what’s all there, because they have choices.”

Students can browse and borrow from the WSDLC using smartphones, tablets, laptops, Chromebooks and desktops—either personal or school issued. Titles can be downloaded for offline reading.

“We’re rural, and there’s lots of places in the state that don’t have good internet access,” Morrill said.

Participation in the WSDLC includes a Digital Book Advantage account that allows members to purchase eBooks exclusively for their students at the district or building level. This gives member schools the best of both worlds: access to a wide variety of titles through the shared collection and the ability to cater to their individual needs, including class sets, informational texts aligned with specific units and professional development materials.

IMMENSE POWER IN COLLABORATION

Almost 200 K-12 buildings signed up for the WSDLC in just a few short months. That number continues to climb.

“When we all join together, we can have a much bigger collection,” Menasha Joint School District Library Media Supervisor Jennifer Peterson, an interim board member, said.

Looking back on the years of work that culminated with the WSDLC’s launch, interim board members point to teamwork as a driving factor in the project’s success. And from the initial idea to final structural review, every step of the way was informed by the invaluable insight of school media specialists from across the state.

“We’re working together to cut costs. We want to make this as affordable as possible and move student education ahead—and we’re doing that through collaboration,” Morrill said. “And there’s immense power in that collaboration.”

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