



Beyond the Textbook— How Digital Content Can Enhance Curricula Strategies

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The promise of digital content in the classroom has become a reality. According to the Sora reading platform's "State of K-12 Digital Reading" Annual Report for the 2022-2023 school year, which encompasses data from 62,000 schools across 50 U.S. states, 13 Canadian provinces, and 75 countries, digital reading has increased significantly over the past few years. Since 2019, total usage has grown by 286 percent.

But statistics don't tell the whole story. The districts below do. Read and hear about their best practices when it comes to using digital content to enhance their curriculum strategies: Tapping the almost unlimited array of resources that provide for diverse learning styles and needs; Using real-time feedback and adaptive learning technologies to help personalize learning; Implementing dynamic and relevant lesson plans that help to maintain student engagement; and more.



Sora is an award-winning digital reading platform that empowers K-12 students to discover age-appropriate ebooks, audiobooks and more from their school library. Backed by the largest, most diverse catalog of digital books available to schools, Sora provides students and educators unified access to curriculum titles, leisure reading, professional development books and the public library. Sora is powered by OverDrive, which also provides the Libby app for public libraries.





Flexible solutions for faculty

Much like most districts across the U.S., Franklin County Schools (FCS), just outside of Raleigh, North Carolina, found itself at a crossroads at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. Facing indefinite closures and logistical challenges, staff needed a new strategy to deliver learning resources to students in a safe, healthy and accessible way. Ultimately, they opted to partner with OverDrive to supply ebooks and audiobooks to students through the Sora platform. Latoya Smith, a Literacy Specialist for Secondary Education at FCS, explains: “We had to ensure that our kids would still be able to have access to all of the material needed for our curriculum without actually having to return or give them all physical books, which we did not have access to. So we needed a nice safe and healthy way to distribute the information to students. And we used Sora to do that.”

On-demand in the classroom and at home

Reading is an anytime, anywhere imperative. It’s not just during scheduled breaks and amid unexpected closures that students need access to materials at home to keep them independently engaged in their learning. Having a robust selection of ebooks and audiobooks at their fingertips can help create a seamless transition.

Students get access to the school’s Sora library on their phone, tablet, or personal computer. Once books are downloaded, they can read or listen to them without Wi-Fi. Kristal Ortegon, Library Media Specialist for Humble ISD in Texas, details how it happens in their district: “Students, when they are here on campus, can select a book and it will automatically download onto their device, so that when they go home, and they don’t have Wi-Fi, they still have access and can continue to read.”

[Click here to hear other advantages Humble found with digital curriculum](#)



A curriculum that supports differentiation

Michael Fumagalli, Assistant Director of Teaching and Learning at Glenbard High School District 87 works at the third largest high school district in Illinois, positioned 22 miles west of Chicago. Glenbard has a diverse population, with 52% of its students being persons of color and 76 different languages spoken at home including English, Spanish, Urdu, Gujarati and Vietnamese.

Fumagalli says that Sora allows them to deliver a fully digital English curriculum on iPads that prioritizes student choice and diverse authorship. “It is important that our students have literary experiences that are both windows into the world and mirrors in which they see themselves. Historically, most English curricula have been predominantly whole-class reads and classic pieces of literature that lacked author diversity. Five years ago, our English department chose to examine this closely and make programmatic changes to increase student engagement and elevate student voice.”

As a result, the English department started this endeavor by offering three student-choice units districtwide. These were very successful. “We now offer 34 student-choice units district wide at every level and every grade, “ says Fumagalli, “Student choice units tend to offer diverse authors and current topics and are a good way to add new voices to the curriculum. Our student choice novels continue to be diverse, with both female authors and authors of color representing over half of all student choice books, by count and by readership.”



Integration with key learning management systems

When software works together, it helps in creating a seamless experience for educators, students, and administrators. When Sora works in concert with other systems like Student Information Systems (SIS) or Learning Management Systems (LMS), it reduces the need for duplicate data entry and manual updates, which saves time and effort. Data synchronization also becomes more accurate, ensuring that information such as student progress, reading preferences, and assignment completions are up-to-date and consistent across platforms.

Tiffany Goldschmidt, Ed.D., Secondary Curriculum Supervisor at Baldwin County Public Schools, explains some other pros: “I think a few other benefits for teachers are that they can track student progress, they can also access supplemental curriculum resources, and use tools with students such as note-taking, annotating, highlighting, conversing for definitions, and bookmarks to set up their lesson plans.”

Goldschmidt also emphasizes the systems are synchronous, so teachers can give every student concurrent access. “You can use it in conjunction with other district applications, with the same district log-ins if you have a single sign-on.” Sora is a single sign-on (SSO) platform that students can access via app or web browser on a desktop, laptop, tablet or smartphone (soraapp.com). The app integrates with a school’s edtech infrastructure and is compatible with many major learning management systems, student information systems and learning object repositories, including Google Classroom, Schoology, ClassLink, and more.

Click here to listen to more about how Baldwin improved its literacy outcomes through digital content



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Affordable solutions for district budgets

Libraries, both in-school and community ones, are all about providing equity to their patrons, but that can be difficult in an era of budget restrictions. “We live and work in a state that has underfunded school libraries for a long time,” says Andrew Maxey, NBCT, director of special programs for the Tuscaloosa City Schools in Alabama. “For a school library to have an exemplary collection, it needs 15 books per enrolled student and the average age [of the titles] needs to be 10 years or less. To maintain that, you need to buy about one book per student per year.”

To supplement their collections, districts like Maxey’s are turning to Sora. Through Sora’s Public Library CONNECT feature, students can access age-appropriate ebooks and audiobooks from the local public library in addition to their school’s digital collection. “For us in our district, OverDrive, and Sora in particular, have been important tools for expanding access for students,” Maxey notes.

Tuscaloosa isn’t the only district that finds the connection to public libraries vital. “We are taking advantage of the public library budget — and the grants they have won — to offer digital resources to our students,” says Lisa Kulka, former coordinator of libraries and instructional materials for the Harlandale Independent School District (TX) and current Director of Libraries and Instructional Materials at Northside Independent School District (TX). “We now have access to so many titles I could not afford with our school district library resource budget.”

Public Library CONNECT further supports equity because no library cards are required; students simply use their existing school credentials. “There are a variety of reasons why students and families don’t have library cards — no proof of address, fear of fines, lack of easy transportation to the library,” Kulka continues. “With (Sora’s Public Library CONNECT) feature, all our students need is their school district login information. We have removed that barrier.”

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— Lisa Kulka, Director of Libraries and Instructional Materials, Northside Independent School District (TX)



Named one of *TIME*'s Best Inventions, the [Sora](#) student reading platform provides every student with access to the right books. Sora is used by 62,000 K-12 schools and millions of students worldwide, supporting the need for required curriculum titles, class sets and pleasure reading with the largest catalog of ebooks, audiobooks, digital magazines and other content. [TeachingBooks.net](#) (acquired in 2021) complements Sora with one of the largest sets of book-specific supplemental resources that “bring books to life.” Parent company OverDrive – which also provides digital content to public, academic and corporate libraries through the [Libby reading app](#) – was founded in 1986 and is based in Cleveland, Ohio USA.

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