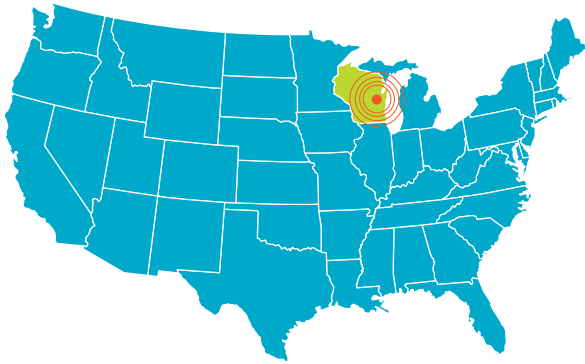


School Software Group Collaborates With Menasha School District To Develop BuildYourOwnCurriculum



MENASHA SCHOOL DISTRICT
MENASHA, WISCONSIN

- 3,800 Students
- 4+ Years Using BuildYourOwnCurriculum

The Pressing Need

Several years ago the Menasha School District in Wisconsin, was faced with the daunting challenge of upgrading and improving its curriculum—a task that hadn't been undertaken in over ten years. Menasha realized that they needed to create a system of curriculum that was aligned with the state standards and with any assessment process developed in relationship to those standards. Otherwise, it would be very difficult for students to succeed with standards-based assessments.

According to Dr. Keith Fuchs, Superintendent (former Curriculum Director): "Not only was there no alignment to the standards, but there was no alignment to the curriculum itself—as far as what was being taught in the classroom. So we asked ourselves: 'if we're going to create a curriculum that's going to make a difference in this district, what are we going to have to do.'"

Adds Dr. David Gundlach, Curriculum and Technology Director: "Our teachers wanted to create a curriculum that would be easy to use, and would give them a reason to delve into it daily or at least weekly. If not, curriculum would be little more than an electronic version of that 'dusty book sitting on the shelf.'"

The Search

David Gundlach, Keith Fuchs and the curriculum council of teachers sat down and mapped out what they wanted the curriculum to look like. "To do it right," agrees both Dr. Fuchs and Dr. Gundlach, "we sought to make the curriculum a living, breathing document that would continue to grow, evolve, and constantly be revised to create an effective curriculum for our students. However, we realized we lacked the necessary tools to accomplish that."

Continues Dr. Fuchs: "We really thought there might be an off-the-shelf solution that we could use, and spent 3-6 fruitless months going coast-to-coast looking for one. There were some solutions out there that allowed us to do some things, but none that allowed us to do everything that we as a district wanted to do."

The Collaborative Solution

After realizing that there was no off-the-shelf solution available, Menasha considered an in-house solution. According to Dr. Fuchs: "It took us about 30 seconds to decide that that wasn't feasible! Our next thought was to create a web-based template for curriculum development that all of our staff could work on anytime, any place (i.e. late in the day, weekends at home)," therefore, speeding up the development process. "We sought to find someone who builds software, to sit down and collaborate with us in the process. We investigated several vendors and chose School Software Group (SSG), because they had a sense of what we were trying to do. They didn't want us to fit something to their needs, they wanted to develop something that fit our needs."

The Implementation & Training Process

BuildYourOwnCurriculum (BYOC) saved Menasha both substantial time and money. According to Dr. Gundlach: "Curriculum writing used to take an average of 40 hours. Now, it takes about 8-10 hours. In addition, I saved money on those curriculum hours. In 2007 I probably spent about one third of what I normally spent in previous years—not because we're getting less curriculum work done, but because teachers are not requesting or needing the time."

Adds Dr. Fuchs: "When we brought our teachers in and started talking about BYOC, their initial response was, 'where's the manual?' And when we said there is no manual, 'we're going to sit with you and in 15 minutes you're going to be able to do this,' I think they were a little skeptical. But when they actually did it, they realized how easy it was for them." Part of Menasha's successful implementation is because the team from their curriculum council involved in the initial development of BYOC ran the gamut from fairly technically savvy to "fearful of turning on a computer."

Dr. Fuchs continues: "If you can turn on the computer, you can use BYOC, because it walks you through the process step-by-step. And you can't break it—very reassuring for many of our teachers. BYOC has allowed our staff to both build the initial curriculum, and then see very quickly what improvements were needed—and go in and do that in a very short time period."



school
SOFTWARE
group

www.schoolsoftwaregroup.com

Unparalleled Service and Support

According to David Gundlach: "I think School Software Group's support and service is extraordinary. It is not like I find in any other area whether it be a technology sector or a curriculum sector. In my position (curriculum and technology) within our district—it's not unusual for me to sit down with a firm and contract out some work. We did that very same process with SSG. The big difference was SSG delivered—an excellent product that was ahead of schedule and under budget! That has never happened for me in the 10+ years in this business."

Dr. Gundlach continues: "Another advantage I see with SSG, is the way they handle user requests. Our user's group community meets twice a year with SSG representatives to discuss the features of BYOC. SSG listens and tells us honestly what can and cannot be done. The feature requests that we all agree are necessary and doable, are often incorporated within days! Even though I'm one of the original pioneers and designers of BYOC, I'm constantly amazed that I can't keep up with the new, easy-to-use features and functions of the product. For the first time in my career I have to read release notes—because I can't keep up with the people at SSG!"

Measurable Outcomes

According to David Gundlach: "The biggest change in our student outcomes is the result of our students now having a greater awareness of the actual learning targets and benchmarks that are going to be covered in a given course before they actually begin the instruction. Previously—even from a fully prepared teacher—students got maybe three weeks advance information. With BYOC, students are receiving information about what's being covered over the course of the next nine months, plus an understanding of how everything that they're learning ties together. That scaffolding process allows students to create a framework in their own heads about what they're learning, and that ultimately leads to increased student achievement."

Continues Dr. Gundlach: "When you compare Menasha to other districts with similar demographics, our scores on standardized tests are measurably higher. The only explanation for this that I can think of is solid instruction and curriculum development."

Adds, Dr Fuchs: "We continue to have our students in each and every building meet Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP), and I'm convinced that it's a direct result of the fact that our teachers feel comfortable working with the curriculum, and that it's being taught on a consistent and regular basis in our schools."

The Right Choice for Menasha

Menasha has been using BYOC for four years. They went through the prototyping for the first year and have been using the production version for about three years. According to David Gundlach: "Our teachers helped create BYOC and have a certain amount of pride in using it. More importantly, teachers like BYOC because it's easy to use. It gives teachers a consistency when they're developing curriculum that enables them to leverage each others expertise. You can almost feel the energy change in the room when all of a sudden it goes from curriculum being this somewhat difficult process that's hard to define and isn't really related to what I'm doing in the classroom, and shifts to, 'oh, this is exactly what I'm doing in the classroom and this is very easy to do. And all I really need to do is put this down and look, it organizes it all for me.'"

Dr. Gundlach concludes: "BYOC was originally designed for one, medium-sized little school district in Wisconsin—and the one thing that has made it a success is that we didn't leave the teacher out of the process. And in the end—if you have a curriculum director's curriculum, you have nothing. If you have a teacher's curriculum, you have everything. And we did it with all the benefits that go along with the technology. But, the key is having a teacher's curriculum, not an administrator's curriculum. That's what encourages continued use by teachers, and results in improved student outcomes."

School Software Group

School Software Group initially concentrated its energies in the Midwest, working in partnership with regional school districts to answer the need for hard-working solutions and rapid service response. Through its dealer network, School Software Group has expanded its efforts nationwide. Currently School Software Group's solutions are at work in over 200 districts throughout the U.S. Every product is based on close, onsite collaboration with educators. Additional information is available online at www.schoolsoftwaregroup.com. School Software Group is headquartered in Appleton, Wisconsin.

"This has been a very exciting journey for us that keeps getting better, because SSG continues to come up with better things for us to do with BYOC. It's very encouraging to see the student achievement and success that we're experiencing now, and know that we will experience in the future as we use these tools to better meet the needs of our students and our staff."

— Dr. Keith Fuchs, Superintendent, Menasha School District, Menasha, WI



school
SOFTWARE
group