

Success Story – Racine Unified School District

Achieving the District Mission Through Curriculum Design

The Racine Unified School District is the fifth largest district in the state of Wisconsin, responsible for educating approximately 19,455 students. The staff members of the district take this charge very seriously and have devoted themselves fully to achieving their district mission, to “educate every child to succeed”.

One way that the leadership of the Racine Unified School District pursues their mission is through their commitment to developing effective and authentic curriculum. Leading the curriculum office is Christopher Thompson, Director of Curriculum and Instruction and Janelle Deckner, Assistant Director of Curriculum. A vital tool in the duo’s toolbox is BuildYourOwnCurriculum (BYOC), a curriculum management system designed to help districts create living curriculum that produces deep, authentic learning. By partnering with BYOC, the Racine has begun developing curriculum that is easy-to-access, promotes teacher commitment, and increases student success.

The Need: The Decision to Use BYOC

The Racine Unified School District officially purchased BYOC in the summer of 2015. The district had just completed a new math and health curriculum that they were planning to roll out during the upcoming school year and needed an effective way to organize and disperse their new curriculum. When the district became aware of this need the curriculum staff knew just where to turn. Thompson and Deckner, did not even look at other curriculum management systems. “BYOC was our only choice,” explains Thompson.

The top three reasons the district chose BYOC per Deckner were BYOC’s “family friendly public site, the capacity to

work digitally with other districts, and the ability to keep all of our curriculum in one place that everyone could easily access”. Thompson added that BYOC’s “drill-down” format was helpful in writing curriculum, providing teachers with a simple and understandable approach, and that BYOC was reasonably priced. “We were able to import documents as well as, access outside websites and other school’s curriculum, too.,” continues Thompson, “above all else, BYOC prevents us from having to reinvent the wheel.”

“BYOC is a clearly laid out curriculum housing system that brings clarity and unity.”

— Janelle Deckner, Assistant Director of Curriculum
Racine Unified School District, WI

Of all the reasons listed, one of the top selling points of BYOC for the Racine Unified School District was the ability to share and view curriculum with local school districts and districts around the nation. “This is a fantastic feature” said Deckner. The curriculum staff used this feature as they were working on their math curriculum to be able to see how other districts have laid out their math curriculum. Thompson continues on about this key feature saying, “This is an awesome feature and we have used it many times so far. If nothing else, it gets you thinking in new directions regarding what you thought was quality curriculum.” The ultimate vision for BYOC in the Racine Unified School District is to have a “one-stop-shop” for all the district’s curriculum that is easily accessible to all staff and parents. They also want to format their curriculum to align to the district philosophy of Understanding by Design.



Racine Unified School District

Racine, Wisconsin

• Enrollment – 19,455 Students

Getting Familiar: Training Staff

The district is still in the process of training their entire staff on how to use BYOC. The district began by training their curriculum writers so that they could efficiently add new and current curriculum into the system. At the start of the first year using BYOC, all math staff were trained so that they would be able to access the new math curriculum. The district will continue to work on training their staff throughout the upcoming school years. Deckner explains that as staff begin training they are sometimes a bit overwhelmed, but quickly become comfortable with the system as they begin to use it. "We often hear that curriculum platforms are a lot to take in, but once they started using BYOC the staff reported that the system is easy" said Deckner.

Next Steps: Implementation and Curriculum Creation

With the math and health curriculum already added to BYOC, the team at Racine has turned their attention to Reading and English Language Arts with the hope to have it rolled out next school year. "As new curricula are rolled out, teachers become more and more aware on how to access curriculum in BYOC" Thompson explains.

To successfully implement all their curriculum, the staff at the Racine Unified School District have integrated BYOC into their Curriculum Program Review Cycle. Deckner explains the process saying, "With each new curriculum that comes due, we move our curriculum to BYOC and roll it out." Thompson continues to explain saying, "Whenever we write or adopt new curriculum, it is written into BYOC. This grows our number of higher-level BYOC users." As teachers and principals begin to use and explore BYOC they can contact these "higher-level" users with questions and suggestions. "This model has worked well for us," adds Thompson, "we train all curriculum writers at the beginning, prior to being able to go in and author within BYOC."

All curriculum programs will be added into BYOC by the 2018-2019 school year, with assessments of the curriculum being made the following year. However, this will not mean the end to work in BYOC, as implementation is never truly

complete, and courses are in continuous review and improvement.

Seeing the Impact: Increased Teacher Engagement

Although still early in their journey with BYOC, Thompson and Deckner have already seen BYOC's impact in their district's success with curriculum. "Our curriculum is more organized and purposeful now" says Deckner and Thompson agrees saying, "We have a warehouse now, a one-stop-shop where we can house and find all our curriculum documents. It's great!".

The new system is also creating more teacher buy-in and curriculum engagement, especially with the newer, younger staff. This is important in helping young teachers become familiar with and knowledgeable about the district's curriculum. Together the curriculum staff uses BYOC to help highlight their expectations to administration and teachers alike. The team is excited to see how teacher buy-in continues to grow as the district becomes more experienced using the program. "The first year of a new curriculum seems to have the teachers in "survival" and "exploration" mode as they get used to the changes. Next year I envision them really diving deep."

Completing the Circle: The Connection between BYOC and Racine's Mission

In the scope of all the tasks a school district must accomplish, the connection between one department and the overall mission often gets overlooked. However, in the case of the Racine Unified School District the work being done in the curriculum office is directly impacting the ability of the district to achieve their mission. As the district begins developing powerful, authentic curriculum through their use of BYOC they are increasing teacher engagement. As teacher engagement increases and as teacher familiarity with the curriculum increases, the level of instruction occurring in the classroom will follow suit. In turn, student learning should skyrocket, helping the district "educate every child to succeed".