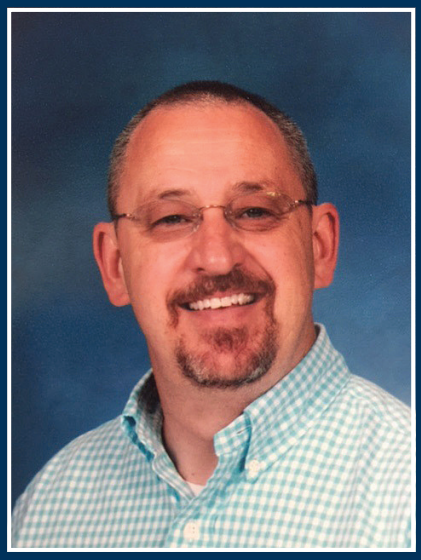

CHALLENGES

- Librarian expected to integrate new digital suite of reference tools and ensure students use them.
- Partnering with classroom teachers to narrow student research topics and improve quality of student work.

SOLUTIONS

- Cengage Learning's Gale suite of products, which includes digital content, tools, and services for libraries.

RESULTS

- Academic performance increases as students narrow research focus and produce more thorough and balanced work.
- Engagement surges as students access reference materials at home and regardless of where they travel within the district.

SUCCESS STORY

Richard McGowan

Librarian, Tascosa High School, Amarillo, Texas

Librarian Tasked with Integrating New Reference Materials Platform to Improve Student Learning Experience

If you've ever wondered whether everything really is bigger in Texas look no further than Richard McGowan's sprawling library at Tascosa High School in Amarillo. Part of his job is to oversee the sixty computers available via two computer labs to more than two-thousand students spread across the relatively large campus. He also is tasked with successfully integrating the district's new technology purchase: Cengage Learning's Gale suite of products, a cloud-based platform that provides digital content, tools, and services designed to promote learning and information discovery in libraries.

"I was just enamored with the products from our initial training," McGowan said.

Prior to the start of school, McGowan gathered all of the school's English teachers and department chairs and organized a weeklong 'get to know Gale' training session to ensure instructors were aware of and understood how to use the new tools at their disposal.

"I found the products to be spectacular," McGowan said. "The department chairs then took what they learned about Gale and went back and taught their teachers what the collection had to offer."

Engaging teachers who are eager to learn about a platform that can help them produce better student outcomes is one thing.

Convincing students is another and would require a greater effort.

SCHOOL-WIDE MARKETING EFFORT LAUNCHED

Incoming high school freshmen are often a nervous bunch and focused more on matters outside the library. It's why McGowan knew he'd have to engage students early and often.

Inside the library McGowan had a captive audience as freshmen were required to participate in an orientation session in which McGowan demonstrated the new databases and research tools. "I also do a refresher course," McGowan noted. "Every time a class comes into the library I run through what's available to jog their memories."

Outside the library, where minds may be more likely to wander, McGowan had to get creative and advertise the new suite of tools. "I created posters and put them up in the classrooms," McGowan said. "The posters show students exactly where to go, how to log in, and what to do afterward."

McGowan's marketing effort is yielding results in and out of the classroom.

ON DEMAND ACCESS IMPROVES STUDENT LEARNING EXPERIENCE

McGowan's entire district established a common username and password to access the Gale databases, making it easier for students to access from the various campuses or even

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Richard McGowan
Librarian
Tascosa High School, Amarillo

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from home. McGowan also discovered an indicator that the posters were, in fact, catching students' eyes and they were trying to log in from home. "On my posters, near the bottom, I have a U arrow ("U⇨") followed by the username and a P arrow ("P⇨") followed by the password," says McGowan. Assuming a student mistakenly keyed the "U⇨" or "P⇨" ahead of the actual username and password, McGowan knows "kids are [accessing] it outside of school because I had a student tell me they tried it and it didn't work."

Not only were students using Gale at home but they quickly became accustomed to using the platform as they moved from school to school within the district. It meant that students were aware of the innovative tools at their fingertips and that they had learned to access the collection anytime and any place they desired.

DIGITAL REFERENCE MATERIALS IMPROVE QUALITY OF STUDENT RESEARCH PROJECTS

"I just don't think there is a better tool available," McGowan said recently about Gale's *Topic Analyzer* tool. The tool helped solve a problem McGowan said was common at Tascosa High: students choosing overly-broad research project topics. "It's a spectacular research tool that not only narrows topics but organizes source material in ways that make student projects more manageable."

Besides narrowing research topic choices, the tool also gives students the reference materials necessary to present additional sides of an argument and produce more objective classroom work. The databases, McGowan noted, empower students to properly cite and format the data sources they used which dramatically improved the quality of their work.

"I'm so happy we changed," McGowan said in regard to the district's transition to the Gale suite of reference tools. "I truly am glad because I just love the products."

Source Code: M16011106

GALE CENGAGE Learning

Cengage Learning is a leading educational content, software and services company, empowering educators and driving learner engagement through personalized services and course-driven digital solutions that bridge from the library to the classroom. Gale, part of Cengage Learning, serves the world's information and education needs through its vast and dynamic content pools, which are used by students and consumers in their libraries, schools and on the Internet. It is best known for the accuracy, breadth and convenience of its data, addressing all types of information needs – from homework help to health questions to business profiles – in a variety of formats. www.gale.cengage.com

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