

How one district created a bespoke ELA resource for new state standards with Newsela

DISTRICT PROFILE

Cabell County Schools

WEST VIRGINIA

Student Population

~12,000

Middle Schools

4



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Kristin Sobotka

MIDDLE SCHOOL LITERACY
ACADEMIC SPECIALIST

THE CHALLENGE

Finding content to support the state’s new ELA standards

Cabell County Schools had been implementing a traditional ELA model across their middle schools when West Virginia passed legislation requiring Career Literacy instruction in 2015. In response, the district revamped its ELA instructional model by implementing an ELA survey course alongside a Career Literacy course, in which the



41 West Virginia ELA standards are taught within career cluster modules. The district had designed a Career Literacy framework and provided teachers with curriculum maps to implement in the classroom, but struggled to find content that supported their instruction. “Industry texts are super complex and if you don’t have contextual knowledge, or the relevant background information, it’s really difficult to make that content accessible,” explained Kristin Sobotka, the Middle School Literacy Academic Specialist at Cabell. And so without the right resources, Cabell educators struggled to adopt the new curriculum with fidelity. “It really became just a lot of “up-at-midnight” Google searches to find content that fit for us, and that’s exhausting on a multitude of levels.”

THE PLAN

Find a resource (and partner) to help bring Career Literacy to life

The district needed to bridge the gap between the vision of their curriculum and the realities of classroom instruction so they could meet the district and state learning requirements. In looking for a partner that checked all the boxes—engaging, current, accessible for students, aligned to their Career Literacy framework, and transparent with teacher utilization—Cabell district leaders approached Newsela. “We wanted someone who understood the curricular impacts of the content, that could give us a more balanced approach to literacy. We had this vision and as soon as we communicated it to Newsela, I knew they saw it too and thought, ‘Oh! We’re here! Let’s do this.’” said Sobotka.

Sobotka described planning with Newsela as a true partnership. “We collaborated together and just talked it out. I brought some of the really great activities and best practices that our teachers were already using, while Newsela had this terrific framework. The team established the content and took our Career Literacy Curriculum to the next step that we were really needing help with.”

THE OUTCOME

Partner to design and implement a custom ELA resource

Once the Newsela team had taken the time to understand the scope and sequence for Cabell’s Career Literacy curriculum, Newsela sourced and curated content aligned to its career clusters, infusing a project-based learning element into each unit as a culminating activity. For sixth grade, Newsela provided modules around public safety, then moved into hospitality for seventh grade, and construction for eighth grade. Sobotka reflects, “In walks Newsela and takes us from a Career Exploration class to a true ELA course as it should be.”

Once it was time to introduce Newsela to educators, Cabell utilized Newsela Professional Learning to model lessons and best practices that supported their curriculum. Moving forward, teachers will receive ongoing coaching from Newsela and Sobotka to ensure they feel confident using the content in their instruction, so it comes to life for different groups of students. Sobotka expressed the district’s renewed passion for content after finding Newsela, a resource that could implement standards in a creative and engaging way. “Working with Newsela was inspiring and innovative. It’s some of the best curricular work I’ve been a part of.”



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