



How Buncombe County Schools empowered teachers across content areas to provide equitable support to ELL and Special Ed students

DISTRICT PROFILE

District

BUNCOMBE COUNTY SCHOOLS

Location

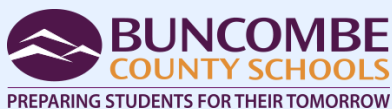
ASHEVILLE, NC

Student Population

25,000

Instructional challenge:

ENSURING INSTRUCTION IS
EQUITABLE FOR ALL LEARNERS



THE CHALLENGE

After making progress with equity of access, Buncombe County works to address equity in support

When it came time to make the switch to remote learning, Buncombe County Schools had a strong foundation, but still faced challenges.

Fortunately, the district had already rolled out a 1:1 device program for all students, K-12. Additionally, teachers had practice with developing digital learning plans.

“Equity of access is one thing we’ve spent a lot of time thinking about. Initially it was a struggle, but we distributed many hotspots to students to ensure they could connect and access their learning materials,” Eric Grant, district Secondary ELA/Social Studies Curriculum Specialist, said.

At the same time, the district’s socioeconomic diversity, and large population of English Language Learner and SpecialEd students meant that the district had to ensure they were addressing equity from all sides.

“We needed to make sure we were supporting kids in the households where parents were not able to be present as much, or where kids were responsible for helping younger siblings,” Eric said.

This kind of “equity of support,” or the ability for students with learning difficulties to get the help that they need is more difficult in a remote setting, where it can be more challenging to get coaches and teachers connected to students for support.



Additionally, not all of the district's curriculum products had scaffolds built into them digitally to support these students when they were not present with a teacher.



THE SOLUTION

Levelled texts open content-area learning opportunities for ELLs and Special Ed students

Buncombe County's ELLs and SpecialEd students needed support and scaffolds, especially in a digital learning environment. The district subscribes to both Newsela Social Studies and Newsela Science and have been able to find the help they've been looking for.

As a supervisor working directly with Social Studies teachers, Eric has helped this group explore everything that's available in Newsela Social Studies to support their work.

"Now teachers can see that Newsela is where they should go for current events and for other types of content, too," Eric said.

He explained that a teacher may ask him for help with teaching the 1920s, and over Zoom or email, Eric can say, "here are three texts sets about the 1920s with foundational knowledge and lesson plans attached to them."

This type of subject-specific, high-quality instructional content is priceless to teachers, Eric believes.

"They'll tell me, 'well that just made my life a whole lot easier,'" Eric said.

Providing equity of support for ELLs and Special Ed students played a significant role in the district's decision to invest in Newsela Social Studies and Newsela Science.



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Eric Grant

SECONDARY ELA/ SOCIAL
STUDIES CURRICULUM
SPECIALIST

Eric explained that in ELA classes, the goal is to get all students reading grade-level material, and Newsela's scaffolds and support "help teachers get there"

However, in content areas like social studies and science, the focus is more about building knowledge and being able to do something with it. In these cases, Newsela opens up new learning activities for students who might otherwise struggle to get access.

"When kids can read content area texts at the just-right level, it helps them get the content, so the teacher can continue to teach and build on those concepts," Eric said.

Additionally, Eric noted that even when students read a text at a lower level, they continue to build literacy skills through annotations, highlighting, and writing prompts.



THE IMPLEMENTATION

Teachers see a complete picture of student learning with Newsela formative assessment features

Buncombe County teachers have taken advantage of the many formative assessment features Newsela provides, both during remote and in-person learning.

Eric noted that a consistent, frequent source of insight into what students know for teachers is reviewing and analyzing student annotations on Newsela content.

Additionally, teachers often pair these insights with observations about how long students have spent reading an article, information that teachers can easily view from their Assignments dashboard.

"When teachers see how long students are on an article, they either get a better understanding of why the student might not have done as well as expected, or they may realize that a student needs extra support," Eric explained.



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During remote learning, the quizzes built into each Newsela article helped add an additional layer of accountability for teachers, along with using writing prompts to tie Newsela content into larger topics and discussions.

Because the most common second language spoken in the district is Spanish, Buncombe County teachers use the translate feature as a learning and assessment tool.

Eric explained that teachers can use Newsela articles in Spanish to help determine if students have challenges with reading in general, or if they are struggling with a text because of their English proficiency.

Moving forward, Eric is excited because the district's adoption of Newsela Social Studies is the first time they've had one consistent social studies resource for teachers across grades 3-12.

"It's a lot easier to make sure everybody is trained and ready to use the resources when everyone is looking at the same one," Eric said.

Eric looks forward to working with social studies teachers more to expand their use of Newsela Social Studies content, and he has regular teacher-led professional development sessions planned.

By using Newsela content to help provide students with needed scaffolds, and also empowering teachers with the support and professional development they need to use that content, Eric is leading his district towards ensuring that all students can access the learning opportunities they deserve.



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