District Spotlight: Garnet Valley School District

Garnet Valley School District (GVSD) is a suburban school district near Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. The district's three elementary schools, one middle school and one high school serve approximately 5,000 students. Currently, GVSD teachers and leaders are redeveloping their schools, courses, programming and systems to personalize student learning. Through this innovation, district leaders aim to provide students with more control over their learning. Marc Bertrando, Ph.D., GVSD's superintendent, communicates the district's vision for personalized learning as:

"…working to set the standard to offer personalized learning opportunities for all students within and outside of [GVSD's] geographical boundaries. For GVSD students, control over the time, place, path and/or pace of their learning is the norm as students choose courses, aligned to [our] curriculum and facilitated by [our] teachers, in face-to-face, blended, online and/or in real world environments."

For GVSD leaders, the path toward personalized learning led them to discover how OER could support students and teachers. Through meetings with GVSD educators; leaders from other districts, colleges and universities; and representatives from private-sector businesses, GVSD leaders recognized several factors that would allow them to "go open" for the 2016-2017 school year. First, GVSD was approaching the end of its five-year curriculum cycles in several English language arts, social science, and world cultures courses. Second, Anthony Gabriele, GVSD's supervisor of learning, development, and professional growth, realized that although the district spent about 70 percent of its funds to purchase proprietary textbooks from an external vendor, teachers only used material found in two to three chapters they deemed to fit their instructional needs. This realization led GVSD leadership to question traditional learning materials' cost-effectiveness (Gabriele, 2017). Given this opportunity, GVSD leaders prepared for their transition to OER with guidance and mentorship

from a Virginia #GoOpen Ambassador District, Chesterfield County Public Schools, along with support of the Office of Educational Technology's #GoOpen District Launch Packet.

GVSD's commitment to empower educators through its OER initiative is evident from its actions. For example, the district's statement of purpose for choosing to use OER is centered on teachers (GVSD, 2016):

"The mission of the curriculum & OER development project is to … invest in our teachers, because we know they are the best resource we have to maximize our students' potential, give our teachers full ownership of what they teach, as well as a chance to personalize curriculum, [and] provide our teachers with the training and support they need to be up to date and successful."

District leaders also sought to ensure the sustainability of the OER initiative by assessing its digital infrastructure, developing a clear leadership structure and redistributing its annual budget.

Assessing the Digital Infrastructure

Before replacing their proprietary learning materials, GVSD leaders assessed whether their digital infrastructure had the capacity to host OER. In previous school years, the district had adopted G Suite for Education (formerly known as Google Apps for Education) to host all content and communications and provided staff and students with access to a variety of devices. Also, after GVSD leaders and teachers vetted a number of options for Learning Management Systems (LMS), GVSD leaders subscribed to Schoology to organize and distribute curated OER.

OER Leadership and Extended Teams

District leaders then formed the core leadership team, including GVSD Superintendent Marc Bertrando; Assistant Superintendent Patricia Dunn; the director for technology, innovation, and online learning, Sam Mormando; and several additional

curriculum supervisors, instructional coaches, and teacher leaders. This team was responsible for overseeing the OER implementation process by developing and monitoring the district's five-year strategic plan, an established cyclical process to review and research OER, design new courses, roll out the necessary professional development (PD), implement the new courses and evaluate the initiative. The core leadership team provided additional guidance for teachers by training them on the use of Schoology and vetting learning materials curated by the extended team. The extended team included 25 teacher leaders across the spectrum of school subjects and grade levels responsible for curating OER and designing full courses aligned to college and career ready standards.

Budget Redistribution to Support Teachers

Leveraging the funds saved by forgoing traditional learning materials, GVSD leaders invest in their teachers. Teacher leaders on extended teams receive about 31 percent of these funds for authoring content. The remaining 69 percent of the funds are dedicated to personalized professional learning opportunities informed by the Future Ready Framework. This framework emphasizes "digital professional learning communities [and] peer-to-peer lesson sharing," rather than traditional "sit and get professional development sessions [to] eliminate the confines of geography and time" (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2015). According to the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO, 2016), GVSD formed a LEAP (League of Educational Advancement Professional Learning) committee of district leaders, teachers and parents, who would develop a menu of professional learning sessions for in-service teachers to choose from and attend. Furthermore, GVSD leaders collaborated with Spider Learning to design a virtual hub for OER professional development, now known as the GVSD Course Development Hub. A part of this hub includes resources to guide teachers on how to curate, evaluate and publish OER. The hub also demonstrates how to integrate OER into a specific course according to the Understanding by Design (UbD 2.0) approach to curriculum development (GVSD, 2018).

Finally, GVSD became the first public school district to partner with the Global Online Academy (2018) to provide teachers with ongoing, job-embedded professional learning in course design for face-to-face, blended, and online learning approaches.

Keeping the Spirit of #GoOpen Alive

Consistent with the #GoOpen Campaign's emphasis on creating an open educational ecosystem, GVSD publicly shares a number of resources to assist other districts seeking to implement OER. For example, the most current version of OET's #GoOpen District Launch Packet (2017) links to GVSD's five-year strategic plan. Also, the aforementioned OER Development Hub provides access to, among other resources, GVSD's repository of links where teachers can curate OER, an OER evaluation checklist, a template for curriculum development, an OER curriculum model flowchart, and a sample OER-integrated course (GVSD, 2018).

Anthony Gabriele believes that OER implementation must focus on the systemic changes necessary to maintain sustainability rather than the learning materials themselves. During the March 2018 PK-12 OER Learning Network convening, he remarked, "The most important thing that [GVSD] learned about OER is [that] it is...less...about the resources. It's really about learning design; how we design and facilitate experiences for kids that matter, are meaning-centered, are social. That [is what] will stick with them beyond the classroom."

Anthony Gabriele (second from the right) at the March PK-12 OER Learning Network Convening
Photograph provided by New America

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