Chicago Public Schools' Curriculum Equity Initiative

IMS Global 2021 Learning Impact Award Finalist

Challenge

In In 2019, Chicago Public Schools surveyed over 500 CPS teachers regarding curricular materials and found that almost 50% reported that they do not have curricular resources in the content areas that they teach. Teachers reported spending hours every week identifying resources and curating their own materials, and over 85% agreed or strongly agreed that curricular resources should be provided by the district. Additionally, the district observed significant variability in the quality of the resources being offered throughout the district, and noted that many students were being exposed to content that was neither standards-aligned nor grade-level appropriate.

Learning Impact Outcome

Built upon the foundation of the SAFARI Montage Learning Object Repository (LOR), Skyline is designed to deliver Chicago Public Schools' first ever comprehensive PK-12 digital curriculum. Skyline provides access to standards-aligned curricular resources from multiple publishers within the LOR, and integrates CPS' enterprise learning systems, including the LOR, SchoolCity by Illuminate Education, Follett's Aspen SIS, and Google Classroom. The district has partnered with publishers Amplify, McGraw Hill, Public Consulting Group (PCG), and Vista Higher Learning to procure licensed materials and develop customized content, based on feedback from CPS district-level teams and teacher reviewers.

By pulling together the highest-quality learning resources and applications into a coherent technical ecosystem, CPS is providing better learning opportunities and user experiences for students, families, teachers, and school/district admins. The ecosystem enables the district to easily revise and improve curricular resources going forward and allows individual teachers to copy Skyline lessons and make their own modifications and customizations, based on the needs of an individual student or classroom.

Solution

The district designed the Curriculum Equity Initiative (CEI) to address and eliminate opportunity gaps in education quality and ensure that all students benefit from high-quality curriculum. A central goal of CEI is to create a standards-aligned, culturally relevant collection of instructional resources that CPS educators across all grade levels and subjects will be able to voluntarily use to meet the needs of all students, especially English learners and students receiving specialized services. To help achieve this goal, the district developed Skyline, a digital ecosystem of platforms and applications based on IMS interoperability standards.

Return on Investment

In the wake of COVID-19, the work of the Curriculum Equity Initiative and the district's mission to build a universal, digital PK-12 standards-aligned curriculum has only become more important. In the fall of 2020, the district released the first Skyline units to provide teachers with materials to support remote instruction. CPS teachers have been using these digital resources to a degree greater than originally expected. Utilization of the LOR in CPS is up by 150% over last year, and teachers have been successfully leveraging the integration with Google Classroom to share Skyline lessons and communicate with students in a remote setting.

The Curriculum Equity Initiative aims to provide all CPS teachers with high-quality instructional resources intentionally designed and aligned within a continuous improvement framework to facilitate the academic progress of every child, in every Chicago neighborhood. Through user feedback and a continuous improvement mindset, the district will continue to leverage the Skyline ecosystem to create an end-to-end user experience for all stakeholders that leverages interoperability standards to share data effectively and securely, eliminating redundant reporting and communication tasks, while simplifying workflows.