



ABC-CLIO Solutions Databases Bring Dynamic Social Sciences Content to Nevada Learning Academy at Clark County School District

SITUATION: AN ONLINE HIGH SCHOOL

Clark County School District is the fifth largest school district in the country and is home to the Nevada Learning Academy, a 100 percent online school that provides both credit recovery programs for middle and high school students and a dual credit program that allows high school students to earn college credit. Students come from a wide range of backgrounds: some are professional athletes and actors who travel frequently, others have health and medical conditions, and still others have selected out of the traditional public school environment as it does not suit their learning needs.

Challenge: Accessing Information

Virtual High School, which has combined with the Academy for Individualized Study to become the Nevada Learning Academy, needed to find a blended learning solution that not only addressed a range of learning styles but also provided extra educational guidance and tools for a school in which students were rarely face-to-face with their teachers.

SOLUTION: BLENDED, DYNAMIC LEARNING

A blended learning environment was developed for the social studies curriculum at Virtual High School. Andrea Damore, who teaches history and government classes at the standard and AP levels, incorporates some components of the ABC-CLIO databases into all of her classes and has even eliminated print textbooks entirely in her history classes because the databases are more flexible and cost-effective. Her plan is to move away from print textbooks for her government classes, too. Damore explained that the databases are much easier to use than are textbooks and are well-suited to a virtual classroom environment. Her classes had previously used eBooks, but results from a student survey indicated that the students disliked eBooks because it was difficult to access them.

The databases work well with a range of learning styles and make it easy to provide instruction around the resources. Whether Damore wants students to give straight facts or engage in deeper thinking, ABC-CLIO Solutions summarizes information in a concise manner that enables her to give better guidance to her students. Damore also creates PDF versions of reference articles, then adds explanations to relevant areas and highlights key information to cut down on questions and to ensure that students get the information they need. She values the Analyze section for its multiple perspectives on history and feels it models good historical thinking for students. She often asks students discussion questions during lessons to stimulate further research.

One major benefit to using ABC-CLIO's databases for social studies, Damore explained, is that they are not tied to a chapter-by-chapter look at topics or eras. She added that encouraging students to do research on their own allows them to develop ideas organically. For example, if students are searching "civil rights," they might find themselves learning about the civil rights movement, which could spark more research. Another advantage to the databases is their collection of trusted, scholarly resources in one place. This is a vast improvement over using a textbook—even a digital one—in which research is largely guided by the structure of the book. Using the databases means students can learn and explore topics.

Damore found the databases to be the perfect fit for online classes, and she loves the format and presentation of information. "When there are more tablets and computers in classrooms," she explained, "it's very natural to use the database as the main textbook." One of Damore's favorite features of the databases is the research lists, and she does all she can to make sure teachers



SOLUTION: BLENDED, DYNAMIC LEARNING (cont'd)

know about it and understand its usefulness. She appreciates having a place to keep all the information she's working with and to post specific lists for her students. Overall, she finds the site very intuitive and easy to use. Other schools in Clark County School District also use ABC-CLIO, and the district has a goal to incorporate a blended learning environment in all of its high schools. Damore noted that using ABC-CLIO's Solutions databases was easy for her virtual high school students, as they already had complete access to computers and to the Internet.

ENHANCING CRITICAL THINKING AND ANALYSIS

Damore expressed that the databases are perfect for any student project that requires research, across all grade levels. The databases represent a superior resource, as searching the Internet brings results that are too broad, and students need guidance as they begin to learn how to research and critically evaluate sources—especially in social studies. Notably, the databases fit well with an effort to incorporate inquiry skills throughout the curriculum, enabling the organic growth of ideas and deep thinking.

EVALUATING SUCCESS

Clark County's Virtual High School needed a way to bring students information that could not only be accessed at any time and place but that was also dynamic and up to date, particularly for the social studies curriculum. The movement away from print textbooks toward online databases with additional tools that teachers could use to create a more effective learning experience was met with a great deal of success. Students could access information easily and received a quality educational experience regardless of their physical location. The dynamic nature of

the databases also meant that students could develop their critical thinking and analysis skills by researching information and reaching their conclusions organically, an important part of 21st-century learning. The district found that it was able to save money and had access to authoritative content with multiple perspectives, which was highly beneficial to social studies teachers in particular. The interactive technology allowed students to maintain contact with their teachers as required for a virtual learning environment.

THE FUTURE

As budget cuts continue to be an issue in education, it comes down to allocating money for items that are worth the investment. Any program that makes use of a blended learning or a virtual classroom needs to make sure the resources it chooses will be worth the cost. Solutions fills that need for Nevada Learning Academy, and Damore's department is planning to work more closely with College Board to extend Solutions to AP classes. The district is also exploring the possibility of incorporating iPad products into the classroom, a mobile platform that is supported by ABC-CLIO Solutions.



Quick Facts

Nevada Learning Academy

- *Absorbed Clark County School District's Virtual High School and the Academy for Individualized Study*

Primary Objective: To give students the option of attending an exemplary online school that challenges, inspires, and prepares students for success in a technological and global economy

Curriculum Focus: Social Studies, English, Geography, History, Math, Health, Science, Technology

ABC-CLIO Databases Used:

- *American History*
- *American Government*
- *World History: Ancient and Medieval Eras*
- *World History: The Modern Era*
- *World Geography : Understanding a Changing World*
- *United States Geography*

DISTRICT LEADER

Andrea Damore

Social Studies Teacher, Nevada Learning Academy
Clark County School District