

Walla Walla School District Goes Digital

A new report from SETDA recommends shifting to Digital Textbooks within 5 years

November 11, 2012

It comes as no surprise that the digital technology infiltrating many aspects of our lives will soon replace the traditional textbook. If industry predictions are on track, it won't be long until images of students lugging 50-pound backpacks to school will look like a nostalgic Norman Rockwell scene.

SETDA, or the State Educational Technology Directors Association's recent report "Out of Print: Reimagining the K-12 Textbook in a Digital Age" outlines the need for a fundamental shift in providing educational materials that are consistent with today's technological environments. They note a widening gap between "what we do in our lives – how we communicate, work, learn, and play-and how we're educating our kids." That concern, combined with the new Common Core State Standards (CCSS), is fueling the need for new, more flexible, and cost effective educational strategies that will improve both teaching and learning.

Other reasons for a shift to digital resources include the ability to seamlessly update information. Many traditional textbooks are quickly outdated and are often kept for 5-7 years before funding allows for new purchases. Digital resources can be updated and responsive to customer feedback. They also provide multimedia and interactive components that students are already accustomed to and which are more engaging for young learners. Teachers can access content at anytime, and in many cases the savings are significant.

Walla Walla elementary schools are already ahead of the game, by piloting a new digital product called **ORIGO Stepping Stones**. This digital curriculum, will assist teachers in helping more students achieve math proficiency. Margaret McKeirnan who teaches 1st grade at Prospect Point Elementary is excited about the new approach. "In the old days, you would teach a lesson and kids either got it or they didn't. With **Stepping Stones**, when kids don't get it there are many options we can use, all with the click of a button." Likewise, students who quickly grasp the concepts don't have to wait for the rest of the class. Each lesson has links to additional activities that allow students to hone their skills and try new challenges. Prospect Point Elementary Principal, Chris Gardea agrees. "We used to hunt all over the place to find activities and strategies to reach our students. Stepping Stones gives us access to resources that are engaging, accessible and include assessments that are aligned to our core standards. With this online curriculum I don't have to go search for material because it is all there." **Stepping Stones** is published by ORIGO Education and was written specifically for the CCSS and provides teachers with



the flexibility to customize their math instruction. Each lesson has coordinating practice pages, games, digital teaching tools and visual models. Gardea also knows that "every year we delay teaching to these standards we are creating a bigger and bigger gap that we will have to fill later on."

But Walla Walla is not ready to give up printed books altogether. McKeirnan says, "little children still need the tactile experience of printed books and one-on-one interaction with their teacher." To address this need, **Stepping Stones** uses large format storybooks and other printed materials that enhance and support the online lessons.

As for those 50lb backpacks? SETDA believes that digital resources not only increase student learning and engagement, but also address health issues by lightening the load.

An international team of experts developed **ORIGO Stepping Stones** to provide teachers with a world-class elementary math program that honestly addresses both the content and intent of the Common Core State Standards. Gardea is a fan. He says that **Stepping Stones** "interactive pieces help us better explain and reinforce concepts...and that is powerful."

###

If you'd like more information about this topic, or to schedule an interview with Edie Barnard, please call 314-475-3061 or e-mail Edie at e_barnard@origomath.com