

How Riverview Community School District Switched to an Intuitive Online Program That Empowers Students to Create Successful Futures

This small district with specialized programs requires EdTech to help prepare its students for a variety of pathways.

Riverview Community School district is tiny. Like, really tiny.

In just 2.1 x 2.1 square miles, they pack in 3,200 students across three elementary schools, one middle school, and a high school.

Located smack in the middle of a suburban community about 20 minutes south of Detroit, MI, the schools are some of the district's only distinguishing features. Riverview's Director of Curriculum, Innovation and Grants Jason Dribble says that, besides a few parks and a city hall, it's mostly family homes that populate the area.

"We don't have a downtown, we're a nesting community. A lot of the people have been here forever, or they've moved back to the community after graduating from college elsewhere. A lot of our staff are alumni of these schools. We're very committed to our community."

The district doesn't let its size get in the way of opportunities for its students. With the No Child Left Behind and Every Student Succeeds acts underpinning their work to prepare for successful futures, they also run a robust career and technical education (CTE) program.

"Our community is really devoted to college readiness, but in recent years we've started to pick up on the idea of career readiness. As a district, we try to promote as much CTE as possible," said Jason.

The district is in a consortium with eight neighboring districts that work together to provide CTE programs for high school students, everything from culinary arts to welding to auto mechanics, dental hygiene, and more.

"It's nice to be in this consortium to share the wealth and meet the needs of students. This year we've partnered with a local community college to provide an HVAC program.

They host it for us because they have the equipment and facilities. It works well for them because they don't have enough students to run the program on their own," said Jason.

For students who are more academically inclined, Riverview offers a dual enrollment college program. In their junior year, students can opt to take college courses instead of AP courses. Students are even sent to local community colleges for some subjects, which are then transferable. "If they get on that dual enrolment track, they have the opportunity to almost have their associate degree done.

"Some students walk across the stage to get their high school diploma as well as an associate degree with the local community college. That means they've got their prerequisites done before walking onto campus of a major university. It's a huge advantage," said Jason.

Where Does College and Career Readiness Fit in?

With a district rife with opportunities, it's important that students are tuned into their own interests and strengths to understand whether the CTE, dual enrollment, or regular school program is right for them.

That's why there's a strong emphasis on college and career readiness, beginning at Seitz Middle School. Although the district was using another EdTech program for a few years, the school counselors began lobbying for a switch to Xello prior to the 2018/19 school year.

"Our counselors were the driving force behind [the change to Xello]. They came to us and said, 'We like this tool better than what we were using. We'd heard a lot of feedback from our neighboring districts who use Xello too.' They liked that our student management system integrated really well with the program," said Jason.

A Ground-Level View of the Switch to Xello

One of Xello's biggest proponents is Nanette Dribble, one of two counselors at Seitz Middle School. She's also Jason's wife.

She and her colleague Bonnie Lopez became enthusiastic about making the switch to Xello after attending training across the state. After seeing the features, they were immediately interested. "Bonnie and I looked at each other and said, 'We need to look into this further,'" said Nanette.

"We knew Xello would be extremely user friendly for us and our [Grade 6-8 students]."

The transition process was smooth and easy. We got great training and we all know we can reach out and have any questions answered quickly.

They noted that the EdTech program they had previously been using was tricky to navigate. Students and faculty alike were challenged to find the resources and reports they needed. They officially made the change in the 2018/19 school year.

"With Xello, [the site] is broken down into educator vs. students [functions] on the website

and is very user-friendly for reports and key word searches. We tend to find whatever we need. If not, we can chat with tech support and they're very responsive," said Nanette.

"As for the kids, [Xello] is bright, colorful and engaging. We definitely get fewer questions like, 'What does this mean?' It takes very little explanation to get started. They can work their way through Matchmaker on their own. Students can peruse the website and tackle it on their own if they want to."

Inspired by the ease of use of Xello, Nanette says they're working with students on a number of lessons and plan to implement even more as time goes on. "In our school, we introduce future readiness in 6th grade. We get them started on Matchmaker so we're a step ahead when they have to get started [on future readiness] in 7th grade by state mandate."

Nanette and Lopez work with students in their health and careers class. They and the teacher present Xello's lessons and talk about colleges, majors, and careers, setting the scene for independent exploration.

"The kids like working through the lessons and learning about careers and colleges. They love the Google Earth feature where they can drop themselves into the campus."

She says the cost of university and college educations always shocks students as they review various programs. "That's another good, visual aspect of Xello: it breaks down financial aid, housing, and other costs. We can then get into a budgeting discussion. That's a lesson we're doing on Xello too."

Talking to younger students about career aspirations is always interesting. Nanette notes that many of them want to be professional athletes. Without dashing their dreams, she encourages them to use Xello's Matchmaker tool to discover options for a Plan B. Even when they're not happy with the careers that come up for them, it's a launch pad for thinking about an alternate future—and the strategies they need to prepare for high school.

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After all, high school in Riverview comes with choices. It helps for 7th and 8th graders to have a sense of the pathway they're best suited for. "In middle school, we start talking about the CTE and dual enrollment programs. It really helps when they've already done some work on considering their future," said Nanette.

Back in the administrative office at Seitz Middle School, Lopez and Nanette make good use of Xello's reporting features. They appreciate having at-a-glance access to individual student progress through the program. It gives them a good foundation for other conversations, including choosing electives and their strengths and challenges in various classes.

Since Xello integrates seamlessly with their scheduling tool PowerSchool, they're able to use information from one program to the other. "If a student gets a class they won't want, we can look at Xello to review their interests to choose something else," said Nanette.

They're also encouraged that the Xello profile will follow each student to high school when they move on from Seitz. "We like that their profile travels with them and builds out even more every year."

From an administrative point of view, Jason says Xello has been a hit. "The transition process was smooth and easy. We got great training and we all know we can reach out and have any questions answered quickly.

"We know we have to prepare our students for everything and anything. This is a tool that is helping us do that."



ABOUT HEATHER

Heather Hudson is a Toronto-based freelance writer and journalist. She specializes in content marketing, corporate storytelling and good old-fashioned journalism. You can read some of her work in The Toronto Star and learn more about her at heatherhudson.ca.