

The Virginia Digital Textbook Marketplace: Guidelines for Implementation

In June 2014, the Commonwealth of Virginia awarded a contract to Copia Interactive to establish the Virginia Digital Textbook Marketplace and Resource Center.¹ The Digital Textbook Marketplace is designed to provide one-stop access to high-quality, media-rich digital content and tools for both core and supplemental instruction and insight into which instructional materials are most effective. Eight school divisions will implement pilot projects in the fall, but many other divisions have expressed a need to learn more about the Digital Textbook Marketplace and the opportunities and benefits it affords. The purpose of this document is to

- Provide context for understanding how this initiative fits within broader statewide education priorities;
- Provide administrators with an overview of Copia Class™, the underlying platform upon which the Virginia Digital Textbook Marketplace was built;
- Explain key benefits divisions can expect through participation; and
- Provide specific guidance on implementing the Digital Textbook Marketplace in local divisions.

Introduction

There has been significant effort among educators and policymakers in recent years to examine the factors that contribute to students' academic achievement. It is no surprise that teacher quality has emerged as the single most important factor.² Many states, including Virginia, have directed significant attention to improving teacher effectiveness.³

Another critical factor at the core of student learning, though far less prominent, are the instructional materials that students and teachers use each day. Matthew Chingos and Russ Whitehurst argue that the choice of instructional materials can have as large—if not larger—impact on student learning than teacher quality.⁴ They contend that those charged with selecting instructional materials have very little

¹ Contract details can be accessed at:

http://www.vita2.virginia.gov/procurement/contractDetail.cfm?contract_id=1000777

² Rice, J.K. Teacher quality: Understanding the effectiveness of teacher attributes (Washington, D.C. Economic Policy Institute, 2003)

³ The Virginia Board of Education approved *Guidelines for Uniform Performance Standards and Evaluation Criteria for Teachers and Virginia Standards for the Professional Practice of Teachers* on April 28, 2011.

⁴ Chingos, M. M., & Whitehurst, G. J. (2012). Choosing blindly: Instructional materials, teacher effectiveness, and the Common Core. Washington, DC: Brookings Institution. Retrieved from http://www.brookings.edu/~media/research/files/reports/2012/4/10%20curriculum%20chingos%20whitehurst/0410_curriculum_chingos_whitehurst.pdf

evidence available to them to suggest which materials are most effective at increasing student achievement.

The Virginia Board of Education has been diligent in its efforts to ensure the quality of textbooks and other instructional materials used in the Commonwealth's classrooms. The Board implemented extensive revisions to the textbook approval process in March 2011, effectively shifting the primary responsibility for the accuracy and quality of content to the publishers. On March 26, 2015, the Board again considered the textbook review process when it voted to discontinue the state level review of foreign language textbooks. This action did not signal a lack of commitment to quality instructional materials, but rather recognized that with the scope and pace of digital content changes, the current seven-to-eight year review cycle has rendered books on the current approved list as obsolete well before the next review is scheduled. In short, current processes and procedures aimed at identifying quality educational materials are inadequate; consequently, Virginia educators will likely continue to have limited information about the effectiveness of most instructional materials available to them. The Digital Textbook Marketplace is designed to change this.

The Digital Textbook Marketplace is far more than a delivery platform for digital textbooks and supplementary content. It will be a source of real time, actionable data that can enable administrators and teachers to determine the most effective instructional resources for specific types of learners, allowing for individualization of instruction much more easily than currently possible, as well as support formative assessments. At the same time, it will enable divisions to refine their purchasing practices to buy only those things that are used consistently and effectively in classrooms, without the long-term commitment that limits progress.

Copia Class™

Copia Class™ is the cloud-based digital learning platform that powers the Virginia Digital Textbook Marketplace. The platform delivers high-quality standards-aligned content from major publishers, secondary publishers, and even small entrepreneurial content providers—searchable all from a single portal. Copia Class™ enables teachers to customize materials from the various sources and to interact with students within the context of the content. Teachers may add links to resources, upload their own materials for student use, and embed formative assessments—pushing these items out to individual students, small groups, or entire classes.

In addition, Copia Class™ facilitates meaningful student-teacher interaction. Teachers can orchestrate content-related discussions among students or choose to conduct individual student consultations in real time. Private, personalized feedback can be embedded directly into the content to engage and encourage learners.

Copia Class™ facilitates anytime, anywhere access. Content downloads onto the student's device, or multiple devices, if needed. Copia Class™ provides a consistent experience across Windows, Mac OS, iOS and Android devices, and will be able to support Chromebooks in late 2015. An Internet connection is not required to access the texts, view nonstreaming videos, interact with the content, or respond to questions or comments from the teacher; however, once students connect to the Internet, their progress, contributions, and work products will be updated instantly.

Copia Class™ will include analytical tools for gaining greater insight into student performance. Through an intuitive dashboard, teachers will have access to a wide range of student learning data that can be presented in detailed performance reports. Performance will be trackable in multiple ways in real time, even down to the level of specific questions. Teachers can monitor lesson progress, identify and remediate learning gaps, identify opportunities for enrichment, and provide individualized support for students.

Copia Class™ will provide tools to enable teachers to individualize instruction. Teachers can group students by performance level and modify or scaffold lessons with specific problems, questions, and resources for each group. As students work through their assignments, teacher-embedded questions and notes appear in the course text. Students can respond, highlight, or ask questions privately within the text to receive personal feedback from the teacher.

Copia Class™ is also designed to empower students to personalize their learning experience. Students can select content that appeals to their interests and learning styles from a catalog of media-rich content. The environment provides tools and support to enable them to progress at their own pace.

Copia Class™ is a flexible platform built to integrate with other essential education applications such as student information systems. Copia provides technical support and guidance to divisions to help them determine what level of integration, if any, is appropriate.

Benefits

The benefits of using the Virginia Digital Textbook Marketplace could be far reaching—even in divisions that choose to begin with a limited implementation. Some of the potential benefits include:

- Dramatically increasing student and teacher access to high-quality digital content.
- Promoting collaboration and participation among students and teachers.
- Promoting equitable access to digital content by enabling students to engage with the content even when they lack Internet connectivity.

- Delivering content across different devices and operating systems, enabling schools divisions to utilize all available technology at school and at home.
- Increasing purchasing power by enabling divisions to purchase only the content that is needed and used.
- Providing an easy and effective tool to support the individualization of instruction.
- Providing unprecedented access to information for data-driven decision making.
- Enabling divisions to examine the associations between various classroom materials and student achievement.
- Enabling schools to determine what resources work best for which types and learners.
- Enabling in-context formative assessments.
- Facilitating financial analysis to guide purchasing decisions based on usage trends.
- Supporting teacher communities of practice.
- Shaping and improving publishers' content through Copia's direct access to the publishing industry.

As the Virginia Textbook Marketplace continues to develop, additional benefits may include:

- Providing granularity in course content, enabling teachers to select and assemble the very best chapters, pieces of content, and supporting resources from leading providers.
- Providing easy access to materials for students who are personalizing their learning goals.

Implementation

The Marketplace is a flexible and dynamic platform that is being refined as it is being implemented in Virginia. This is a completely new approach in PK-12 education and requires changes in policies and procedures as well as teaching and learning methods. As such, Copia Interactive is seeking input from school divisions to ensure that the resulting platform reflects the needs and preferences of Virginia's schools.

As noted previously, the Marketplace will provide digital textbooks from a variety of large and small publishers, but will also provide access to learning materials from other sources and in various forms as well. Ultimately, the Marketplace will provide learning materials and content from textbooks in the smallest, most reconfigurable ways. In practice, teachers may choose only one chapter from a textbook, or one interactive demonstration from a particular publisher—or perhaps even choose different chapters from different textbooks to cover the same material depending on the student's needs. This will ensure that teachers can customize their curriculum for each learner and students will have the ability to choose materials that further

their personal learning goals. This will be a fundamental capability of the system when it is complete.

At this time, however, many providers have not moved to this level of content granularity. Copia Interactive and the Department of Education will be working directly with publishers over the next school year to achieve this goal. Until this has been accomplished, school divisions will have the option to purchase complete digital textbooks and other digital learning materials. The price for materials are established by the publishers; no division will pay more for the materials accessed through the Marketplace than they would pay if they purchased the items directly from the publisher.

Each division will determine its purchasing procedures. Copia Class™ supports various purchasing models. For example, a division may choose to have only one person authorized to make purchases on behalf of the division. Other divisions may choose to authorize department chairs to make purchases. Still other divisions may elect to allot a certain dollar amount to each teacher to spend on materials. All of these models can be easily managed through Copia Class™. Purchases can be monitored and tracked in real time to ensure that budgets are not exceeded.

At the school division level, this approach requires a major change in instructional materials purchasing. It requires that divisions consider textbook purchases as a yearly leasing expense, rather than as a multiyear purchase expense staggered between different subject areas in different years. This is not unlike the recent shift from owning to leasing buses. Currently, divisions purchase textbooks for use for several years only to find that they are quickly outdated. By leasing the digital materials on an annual basis, divisions are assured that they will have access to the best, most up-to-date materials available. Still, until publishers are comfortable with the new model, they will continue to offer incentive for multiyear commitments. Each division will need to weigh the costs against the benefits of single-year flexibility. Copia Class™ will be able to track your purchases from different publishers and their attendant licenses and rights.

Another significant change in procurement policy is that schools will only pay for the materials they actually use. In practice, schools will be able to quickly respond to changes in enrollment, shifts in student needs and interests, and other changes in instructional needs.

The Virginia Digital Textbook Marketplace is a VITA contract. Schools will be able to purchase textbooks from their division-approved list without having to go through a formal competitive bid process. By purchasing an average of five or more textbooks per student, divisions receive Copia Class™—the interface to all of the content and tools—at no cost. For divisions that choose to transition more slowly to this system, they may access Copia Class™ for a fee of \$15 per student annually plus the cost of the textbooks.

Though there is nothing in the VITA contract that requires schools to purchase their instructional materials through Copia, the Department's aim in creating the Virginia Digital Textbook Marketplace is to make it easier for school divisions and teachers to individualize and personalize learning. This supports various other initiatives from the Department.

The Department of Education fully expects that schools will need time to transition to this model. Many may initially choose to focus on using the Virginia Digital Textbook Marketplace for a single subject area or one grade level. The platform can easily and effectively accommodate all of these models.

Some divisions have posed questions about the role of Open Education Resources (OER) in the Virginia Digital Textbook Marketplace. Many teachers collect and routinely use free digital learning materials and will likely continue to do so even with the availability of the Virginia Digital Textbook Marketplace. However, finding OER that are good, provide support for special needs students, align to Virginia Standards of Learning, and can be used on multiple operating systems can be challenging. Furthermore, teachers often lack a system to share the materials in ways that support individualization and personalization, particularly that provides student data to assist teachers in achieving these important goals.

Although materials in the Marketplace are generally those created by publishers, the platform will also provide access to selected OER as well. These materials have been vetted by the education community, have been aligned to the Virginia Standards of Learning, meet accessibility standards, and can be used on most operating systems. The built-in teacher management features will enable teachers to assign specific materials to specific students, provide supporting materials for different students, track progress and achievement, and communicate directly with students as needed.

Some school divisions have inquired about how the Virginia Digital Textbook Marketplace differs from publishers' Web sites. The most obvious difference is that users can access different publishers' materials from a single portal. This eliminates the need to set up multiple accounts for teachers and students in different systems, making it easier to individualize instruction. It also eliminates the need to train students and teachers to use multiple systems. Divisions that have purchased materials directly from individual publishers should request of the publisher that the content be made available through Copia Class™. This will enable divisions to access the content and the added features provided by Copia Class™.

Next Steps

There are several steps school divisions can take to begin transitioning to the Virginia Digital Textbook Marketplace.

- Educate School Boards, staff, teachers, parents, and students to ensure they understand individualized and personalized learning and how this technology can support this type of learning.
- Work with educators to individualize and personalize learning. Technology enables teachers and students to do this more easily, but it will not replace a good teacher. Students may need to learn how to establish their own learning goals and develop strategies for managing their time. Administrators, teachers, and students need to learn how to use data effectively to help reach the learning goals set for each student.
- Ensure adequate bandwidth for students and ensure they can connect easily to the network. In Bring-Your-Own-Technology (BYOT) environments, schools may choose to provide charging stations.
- Consider providing students with access to tablets or other mobile devices (smartphones will be supported in future version of Copia Class™, possibly as early as late fall 2015).
- IT departments should create easy logins to the Marketplace. Copia staff will assist IT staff in accomplishing this task.
- Host a preview of Copia Class™ so that all stakeholders can see how it can be used from student, teacher, administrator, and parent perspectives.
- Review division policies regarding textbook approval and purchasing procedures to prepare for any changes that might need to be made by the School Board or administration.
- Review materials from publishers and talk with them about providing access to their digital materials within the Copia environment. Take advantage of the platform's capabilities to establish groups within Copia Class™ to review materials and to expand options to include smaller or lesser-known publishers.

Conclusion

The establishment of the Virginia Digital Textbook Marketplace is a natural step forward for the Commonwealth. Since 1989, the Commonwealth of Virginia has invested approximately \$1 billion in infrastructure and hardware improvements in schools. The Web-Based Standards of Learning (SOL) Initiative, through which these funds have been made available to schools, is perhaps best known for its impact on Virginia's statewide assessment program. Less evident to many people is the fact that the initiative was originally designed to also ensure adequate access for instructional and remedial needs. As divisions began reaching the goal of administering 100 percent of SOL tests online, many schools turned their attention to the *instructional* benefits that a robust infrastructure can provide.

The Department of Education has also leveraged this infrastructure for instructional purposes by developing and/or supporting the development of resources that benefit all schools. These efforts include expanding virtual learning opportunities, investing in eMediaVA, and creating digital resources such as the Infinite Learning

Lab, Virginia on iTunes U, EduWidgets, and the Share the Skies Internet Telescope—all of which have placed even greater demands on the existing infrastructure.

In 2013, the Department of Education recognized that the demand for ever-increasing bandwidth would continue and embarked on a collaborative effort with EducationSuperHighway to ensure that Virginia schools were digital-learning ready now and in the future. Together, we conducted a statewide test of Internet connection speeds and a statewide broadband project aimed at improving broadband access across the Commonwealth. The data resulting from these efforts are shaping plans that will ultimately ensure affordable and consistent broadband across the Commonwealth.

There have also been significant improvements in the availability of computing devices to deliver digital content since the Web-based SOL initiative first began. The Virginia e-Learning Backpack initiative will likely place approximately 82,000 tablet and/or laptop computers in the hands of students. For the first time, Virginia's schools are within reach of providing every child consistent access to a personal computing device.

We know that technology in the classroom makes little difference if it isn't in the hands of an effective teacher. In 2004, the Virginia General Assembly had the foresight to recognize this fact. They authorized and funded two new positions— instructional technology resource teachers (ITRT) and technology support staff. Together, these professionals ensure that classroom technology is reliable and that teachers know how to use it effectively.

The Virginia Digital Textbook Marketplace builds on all of these achievements and brings Virginia one step closer to realizing the ability to provide a personalized learning experience for every student in Virginia. This final piece of easily-accessed digital resources, added to Virginia's investment in infrastructure, hardware, and professional development, can make a real difference in the education of all students. That's been the partnership's vision of Copia Class™ as the vehicle for The Virginia Digital Textbook Marketplace.

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