Success Story: Millard Public Schools, NE

Why Implement Turnitin?
Millard Public Schools serves 22,000 students in suburban Omaha and is home to Nebraska’s first International Baccalaureate (IB) program, a curriculum that encourages students to become active, lifelong learners. IB was the initial reason the district subscribed to Turnitin. “We were required to ensure that material we turned in was the student’s original work,” reflects Kelly Thielien, Millard North High School teacher/librarian. “Our use of Turnitin spread from there.”

Introduction
The district is known for innovation and achieving world-class results. During the 2008 strategic planning process, the curriculum committee, led by Associate Superintendent Mark Feldhausen, decided to emphasize writing across the curriculum and to acquire technology tools to support it. The committee voted unanimously to integrate Turnitin into the curriculum and to fund a district upgrade for all the Turnitin features, including OriginalityCheck™, PeerMark® peer review, and GradeMark® paperless grading.

Benefits
Provides Consistent Support for Writing Across the Curriculum
“The biggest challenge to writing across the curriculum is helping faculty who are not writing instructors,” says Thielien. “They may feel unprepared, but we suggest that they focus on the content and on having students write about it. We train faculty about the importance of writing as part of the learning process and introduce Turnitin as a tool to help them get there.”

Now, teachers district-wide are using Turnitin to support writing as an interdisciplinary instructional strategy, including to help students learn to paraphrase and cite sources. “Our teachers also use the Turnitin discussion boards with great success,” observes Millard North teacher/librarian, Stephanie Burdic. “For shy students, it’s better than classroom interaction, and teachers control the conversation.”

Erin Dietsch, teacher/librarian at the district’s Russell Middle School, sees the day when the traditional process is history. “Today, pioneering teachers use the totally paperless process,” she says. “But as younger, ‘digital native’ teachers come onboard, it will become more and more common.”

Creates an Opportunity to Teach Students What Editing is All About
“PeerMark helps students to understand what to look for in someone else’s writing,” says Thielien. “We want the papers clean mechanically, but being sure the content is where you want it to be is more important during the peer-editing stage of the writing process.”

Dietsch agrees: “The first thing most students want to look for is a spelling or punctuation mistake. We create focused questions within PeerMark that encourage them to read and think.”

Impact
“When we give our students a broader audience and they’re not writing a paper for only the teacher to read, they write for a purpose,” says Donna Helvering, head librarian for the district. “Collaborative writing, supported by Turnitin, gives them new motivation and engages them. Scores on standardized tests confirm how well our students are doing. All of our teachers are monitored and are expected to teach the curriculum using writing. We expect everyone to have strong writing skills, and our test scores show it. From both the teacher’s and the student’s standpoints, we have a win-win situation!”

“PeerMark is awesome. Our kids love having an audience besides just their teacher when they write.”

Donna Helvering
Head of Media/Information Centers
Millard Public Schools

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