

How Whitnall Middle School has Built Media Literacy with The Juice Over 2 Years



Whitnall School District, Greenfield, WI

AT A GLANCE

Over the past 2 years, teacher Chris Bily at Whitnall Middle School has used The Juice to implement a media literacy course to improve world awareness and student engagement. In it's second year, The Juice has become an interdisciplinary resource for teachers and articles are incorporated into multiple subjects.

School Profile

Whitnall Middle School

The Whitnall School District is a small suburban public school district located outside Milwaukee in Greenfield, Wisconsin.



579
students



21.4%
open enrollment



26.9%
economically
disadvantaged

<https://apps2.dpi.wi.gov/reportcards/home>

CHALLENGES

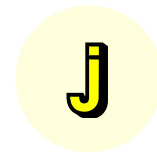
- Lack of media literacy and dissatisfaction with video- based current events solutions
- Lack of student engagement during the daily guided study period
- Providing equitable instruction for “bubble” students who did not qualify for intervention services but needed literacy support

SOLUTIONS

- A new guided study period schedule with improved instructional focus
- A guided study class that focuses on media literacy using The Juice



New
Schedule Model



The Juice
Current Events

RESULTS

- 1 Broadened Student Background Knowledge**
Over the 6-week course, students increased their understanding of what is happening in the world.
- 2 Increased Student Engagement**
Attention, curiosity, interest, and motivation increased as a result of using The Juice.
- 3 Improved Student Reading Skills**
“Bubble” students were able to access texts at their reading level with accommodation tools to build comprehension skills.



“

[The Juice] is the best product I've been able to find in terms of at-level current events that are applicable to students. I have yet to find anything that is as engaging for students.

”



Chris Bily
Whitnall Middle School,
Greenfield, WI

THE CHALLENGE: A LACK OF ENGAGEMENT AND A GENERATION OF STUDENTS WHO NEED MEDIA LITERACY SKILLS

As part of their continuous improvement strategy, school leaders at Whitnall Middle School, a small suburban school outside of Milwaukee, routinely survey teachers and students to gauge engagement and satisfaction with the academic schedule.

The results indicated that their scheduling model wasn't meeting the needs of their students. The issue seemed to lie in their Connect class.

In previous years, the class was used to accommodate students who received math or reading intervention without pulling them from their core classes. Students who did not receive interventions attended Connect class during this time, which mostly functioned as a study hall for students.

Leaders were concerned over the lack of student engagement and consistency in how students were expected to spend their time in Connect, which led to increased behavioral issues during the class.

Chris Bily, a 7th-grade teacher, advocated for a replacement schedule model after seeing its success in his prior school district. "It was an extension type of course, that the teachers, for the most part, got to choose what they taught," he said. "It could be a passion project or even just another curriculum that doesn't fit neatly into a core class."

School leaders implemented Bily's suggestion with their version of the model, calling the class time "Flight." The goal of the new model was to provide more structure and consistency across the school and increase student engagement during that time.

Teachers were free to decide what they wanted to teach, and the class cycled on a six-week rotation. By the end of the school year, all students (except for the students receiving intervention) attended each of the Flight classes provided at their grade level.

THE PLAN: BUILD NEWS LITERACY

Bily knew right away that he wanted to teach a news and media literacy class. He believed that teaching students how to navigate the information they consume online is an invaluable life skill that all students need to develop.

“When I go into the hallway, I see how many kids are on their cell phones and think about the rumors that they hear online. That's what they need to learn how to navigate, so just in terms of life skills that my students need access to, it's important, and it should be a part of the curriculum.”

Throughout his course, Bily helps students think critically about their media consumption. After doing a media literacy lesson, students apply what they learned to the articles in The Juice. For example, after teaching a lesson on how students can determine the credibility of a piece of information by identifying its primary purpose, Bily has students discuss a Juice article and identify its purpose and credibility.

54% of teens get news from social media (Facebook, Twitter)

50% get news from YouTube at least a few times a week.

Common Sense Media Survey, 2020



The Juice provides the active learning and engagement my prior solution lacked. Plus, it allows students to move at their own pace to better process the information they are consuming.



ENGAGE STUDENTS WITH CURRENT EVENTS

Bily was unsatisfied with video-based current event platforms and didn't feel his students' passive consumption of current events engaged them. Most students "zoned out" while watching, while others didn't have the time to process the information before the class moved on. After being introduced to The Juice, Bily recognized the potential to increase student engagement while providing students with access to quality current event content.

Bily thought content from The Juice would pair well with the Checkology curriculum from The News Literacy Project. Throughout his six-week course, students in Bily's class read The Daily Juice and answered the questions three days a week. Mondays and Fridays were optional, but Bily says many students still chose to read The Juice because it had become a part of their routine, and they were excited to read it.

Year 2: Building a School Culture of Interdisciplinary Instruction with Current Events



THE PLAN: ANCHORING LESSONS IN CURRENT EVENTS

Following a successful first year integrating The Juice into Whitnall Middle School's Media and News Literacy course, teacher Mr. Biley saw an opportunity to expand its use across other subjects. Impressed by how The Juice engaged students with current events, he collaborated with colleagues in ELA, History, and Current Events courses, integrating The Juice to enrich learning experiences across disciplines.

EXPANSION ACROSS SUBJECTS

The expansion into ELA, History, Ancient Civilizations, and Current Events courses has created a dynamic cross-curricular approach. The success of this expansion is partly due to Whitnall's six-week Media and News Literacy rotation, which familiarizes every 7th-grade student with The Juice's interface and functionality. With new features such as article assignment capabilities, teachers can now easily align their lessons with current events, increasing the relevance and accessibility of complex subjects.

Bily said one of the biggest successes he has noticed with using The Juice is students' awareness of what is happening in the world. He also noted students' increased confidence in discussing important issues — something that's been bolstered by reading current events in multiple classes.

“Current events are so important for students and there are not many platforms out there that give students an unbiased approach, as The Juice does.”

“Making those connections for kids is a big success!”

“This week, for example, there was the story about Montana being the first state to ban TikTok. You want to talk about a story that most of my students clicked on first because we have been talking about that being a Supreme Court issue and how that impacts what sort of things you can have on school devices versus personal devices, said Bily. “It's stuff that's impacting them, so they clearly care about it.”

By using current events to connect students to their world across multiple classes, The Juice is empowering students to better understand the world and how seemingly disparate subjects are all connected.

Year 2: Building a School Culture of Interdisciplinary Instruction with Current Events



CROSS CURRICULAR USES HOW EACH SUBJECT USES THE JUICE

The Juice has proven adaptable to each subject area, reinforcing subject-specific skills and helping students connect classroom topics to the world around them.

ELA

Teachers use The Juice to reinforce vocabulary and reading comprehension. Articles offer a natural context for students to practice literacy skills. Each article pairs with an ELA standards-aligned comprehension question so ELA teachers can monitor progress on literacy goals.

Ancient Civilizations Course

The Juice offers articles that make historical conflicts relatable. For example, discussing Middle Eastern conflicts through both ancient and modern perspectives enables students to see history's ongoing impact. As Mr. Biley says, "We are very deliberate about trying to make historical issues relevant to kids now. Otherwise, it will be really hard to get them to engage in the material."

US History

Teachers integrate current news with historical events, showing students that history influences modern issues. As Mr. Biley notes, teaching students that historical events shape today's world helps them see history as living and relevant, rather than distant and irrelevant.

Current Events Course

The Juice is central to Whitnall's 6th-grade Current Events course, providing daily articles that keep students engaged and informed about the latest news. Because the reading levels of articles are adaptable, diverse groups of students can still read the same news and discuss and debate current issues.

CONCLUSION

By expanding The Juice beyond Media Literacy, Whitnall Middle School has embraced a cross-curricular approach that enriches student learning in multiple disciplines. The platform's ease of use, real-world connections, and adaptability to different subjects have made it a valuable asset for teachers. Whitnall's experience demonstrates that The Juice is not only a powerful tool for media literacy but a versatile resource that enhances student engagement and relevance across multiple subjects.