

HOW WHITNALL MIDDLE SCHOOL BUILT ENGAGEMENT AND MEDIA LITERACY

OVERVIEW

Over the past 2 years, Whitnall Middle School has used The Juice to implement an online media course to improve student engagement, media literacy, and an interdisciplinary resource for teachers.

SCHOOL PROFILE

The Whitnall School District, a small suburban public school district in Greenfield, Wisconsin.



26.9% ECONOMICALLY DISADVANTAGED



579 STUDENTS



21.4% OPEN ENROLLMENT

CHALLENGE

- Lack of media literacy and dissatisfaction with video-based current events solutions
- Lack of student engagement during the daily guided study period

SOLUTION

- A new guided study period schedule with improved instructional focus
- Incorporation of The Juice into a guided study class that focuses on media literacy

RESULTS

01

BROADENED STUDENT MEDIA LITERACY

Over the 6-week course, students increased their understanding of what is happening in the world.

02

INCREASED STUDENT ENGAGEMENT

Attention, curiosity, interest, and motivation increased as a result of using The Juice.

03

IMPROVED STUDENT READING SKILLS

"Bubble" students were able to engage at their reading level to build comprehension skills.

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

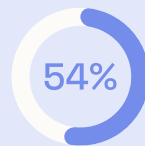
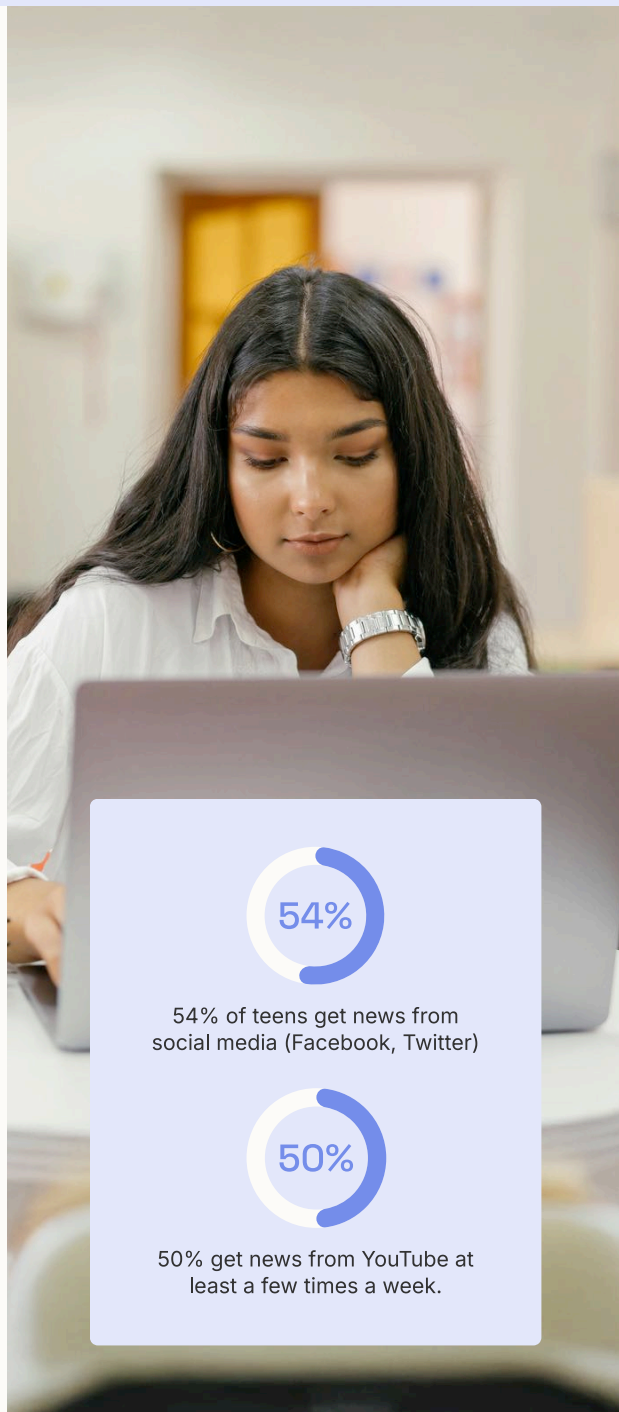
At Whitnall Middle School in Greenfield, Wisconsin, school leaders regularly surveyed students and teachers as part of their commitment to continuous improvement. Survey feedback revealed a clear issue: the existing academic schedule — and particularly a study hall-style class called Connect — was falling short. The class lacked meaningful engagement, contributing to rising behavioral problems.

Chris Bily, a 7th-grade social studies teacher, proposed a solution: replace Connect with teacher-designed “extension” courses that focused on topics students found more engaging and relevant. School leaders approved the idea, giving teachers the freedom to develop their own curriculum for a reimagined Connection class.

Bily immediately knew what he wanted to teach—news and media literacy. He saw it as a crucial life skill that could help students navigate the overwhelming amount of information they encounter online.

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“I see how many kids are on their cell phones and think about the rumors they hear online,” Bily said. “They need to learn how to navigate the internet. It’s important, and it should be part of the curriculum.”



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



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

ENGAGE STUDENTS WITH CURRENT EVENTS

Bily was frustrated with video-based current events platforms, which encouraged passive consumption rather than active engagement. Most students “zoned out” during the videos, while others didn’t have enough time to process the information before the class moved on. After being introduced to The Juice, Bily saw an opportunity to boost engagement while providing students with high-quality, age-appropriate news content.

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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.

He paired The Juice with the Checkology curriculum from the News Literacy Project to create a more dynamic and interactive six-week course. Three days a week, students read The Daily Juice and answered accompanying questions. Although readings on Mondays and Fridays were optional, many students chose to participate anyway—it had become a routine they looked forward to.

Throughout the course, Bily emphasized critical thinking about media consumption. After each media literacy lesson, students applied their learning to the articles in The Juice. For example, following a lesson on identifying the primary purpose of a news story to assess its credibility, students analyzed a Juice article and discussed its intent and trustworthiness.

THE RESULTS

INCREASING ENGAGEMENT, BUILDING MEDIA LITERACY

By integrating The Juice into their Connections curriculum, Whitnall Middle School has embraced media literacy, reading comprehension, and critical thinking as essential components of student learning across disciplines. The platform’s ease of use, real-world relevance, and adaptability across subjects have made it a valuable resource for teachers and students alike. Whitnall’s experience demonstrates how The Juice can be a powerful tool for boosting student engagement.

