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# Vail School District, Arizona

## Vail School District, AZ Says Goodbye to Textbooks and Hello to Tech

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There was a stunned silence in the room. I then walked over, scooped it up, popped open the screen, and... holding by the screen bezel, booted it up. It came up perfectly. The board approved the purchase!”

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Vail School District in Arizona embraces the digital life with its Beyond Textbooks initiative, now in its sixth year.

### District Needs

Once an old-fashioned ranching community with a one-room schoolhouse, Vail, Arizona now has 19 schools, more than 12,000 students, and a decidedly 21st-century approach to education. The Beyond Textbooks Initiative\* grew out of ideas germinated at Empire High School, the district’s first 1:1 school. Empire, which opened in 2005, is a wireless laptop school that was designed to allow students to learn digitally. Today, classes use no print textbooks, focusing instead on digital content. With the launch of Beyond Textbooks in 2008, all schools in the district have access to digital content.

The Beyond Textbook Initiative\* is powered by Beyond Textbooks Wiki\*, a dynamic website that allows teachers to house and share resources over the entire district. The wiki has grown as teachers add their favorite content, from free or subscription-based sources to lessons they’ve created. The idea, says the district’s CIO, Matt Federoff, is to “harness their enthusiasm, see what they’re passionate about, and give them a place to shine.” He points to a fifth-grade teacher who has posted nearly 200 lessons and a middle-school speech therapist who has added information about ways to help students who struggle with reading meet the K-5 language standards.

Beyond Textbooks, as its name makes clear, is an attempt to build a curriculum that does not rely on the traditional, print textbook. “No vendor can provide it all,” says Federoff. “Take iTunes\*. We don’t buy albums; we buy songs. As a teacher, I may want the Civil War from one vendor, but I want World War II from another. We look for the best bits and pieces from multiple sources that most closely match our instructional goals. Invert the curriculum!” The bits and pieces that make up the digital curriculum are often free content that teachers create or find online. In addition, they include subscriptions to premium content from such providers as Discovery Education Streaming\*, ABC-CLIO\*, and BrainPOP\*.

In addition to lessons for individual students, the Beyond Textbooks\* calendar includes offline lessons as well as audio or video content that teachers can share with large groups using the projectors, ceiling-mounted screens, and enhanced audio speakers found in classrooms throughout the district.

## Solution Approach

Vail School District's original plan was to phase the program into a few subject areas at a time but everybody wanted in from the start. "I never imagined just how fast and far it would take off," says Federoff. "In all the years I've been in this line of work, I've never seen something with this much uptake."

Vail opened Empire High School in 2005, the first 1:1 high school in Arizona. Starting in 2013, all Vail high schools are 1:1, with new students receiving a Lenovo\* Chromebook. A BYOD initiative has been in place since 2009 as well. At the K-8 level, students use a mix of MacBooks\*, iPads\*, and Chromebooks in the classroom.

Vail's 1:1 initiative took root in 2004, stemming from a desire to move beyond traditional textbooks and printed instructional materials. First put into place at Empire, it's now district-wide at the high school level. The knowledge gained from this initial foray into digital content led directly to the Beyond Textbooks Initiative\* in 2008.

Federoff says durability and serviceability are two of the main reasons the district selected Lenovo\* Chromebooks. "We brought the sample Lenovo\* Chromebook to the Governing Board Study Session. When a board member asked, 'Why this model?' we tossed the machine through the air to land in the middle of their desks. There was a stunned silence in the room. I then walked over, scooped it up, popped open the screen, and . . . holding by the screen bezel, booted it up. It came up perfectly. The board approved the purchase!"

## Results That Matter

In 2009, Vail opened Beyond Textbooks\* to other Arizona districts, and now 95 partner districts are part of the Initiative, serving 90,000 students and more than 6,000 teachers. The Beyond Textbooks Wiki\* contains more than 25,000-curated examples of standards-aligned digital content, discovered and/or created by teachers.

In fact, Vail is now the largest provider of digital content in Arizona. In 2014, Vail reached another milestone when a district in Wyoming joined the initiative, thus taking Beyond Textbooks\* beyond Arizona.

## At A Glance

The Vail School District serves:

- More than 12,000 students
- Seven elementary schools, four middle schools, and five high schools, as well as unique offerings including a K-8 school and a K-12 school.

Empire High school, a laptop one-to-one school, opened in 2005 with an emphasis on digital content. The Beyond Textbooks Initiative\*, launched in 2008, extended Empire High's textbook-free approach to the entire district. Today the district is textbook-free at all grade levels and subject areas.

## Infrastructure

- High school students are 1:1 with Lenovo ThinkPad 11e\* Chromebooks.
- K-8 students use a mix of MacBooks\*, iPads\*, and Chromebooks on carts.



## Learn More

Website: [Beyond Textbooks](#)

[Digital Content Case Study \(PDF\)](#)

Article: [In a Digital Future, Textbooks are History](#)

