

Grand Erie School District Helps Its Secondary Schools Tackle Plagiarism

The Grand Erie School District in Ontario knew they had a plagiarism problem, and they wanted to solve it for the whole district so that every student would benefit.



At a Glance

A number of key features persuaded Grand Erie that Turnitin was the right solution for their schools:

- *Hosting* - As a hosted service it ensured that neither the district nor the schools would have a big IT burden.
- *Flexibility* - The system provided a uniform approach to plagiarism, while leaving teachers to decide for themselves how to integrate Turnitin into the classrooms.
- *Ease of Use* - The simple interface ensured that every teacher would be able to use the system, even those who were less sophisticated with computers.

By introducing Turnitin to the entire district, they were able to ease the training and support burden for their schools and leverage their unified purchasing power, while leaving it up to individual schools to decide how to integrate it into the classroom.

Helping Teachers Solve the Plagiarism Problem Their Own Way

Teachers across Grand Erie School District knew that plagiarism was a problem, but very few of them were well equipped to find their own solution. Many of the web-savvy teachers used Google and other online tools to spot-check suspect papers, while others who lacked the time or the computer skills simply turned a blind eye.

As a teacher consultant for the school board, Lynn Abbey had spoken with enough of these frustrated teachers to see that something needed to be done to address the problem. And because many of her schools lacked significant technology resources of their own, she saw it as a problem that needed to be addressed at the district level.

“We wanted to give teachers the tools they needed to address this problem their own way, rather than try to force everyone to solve it the same way. Our job was just to make sure they had the tools,” she said.

Many of the schools in the Grand Erie School District simply didn't have the resources to solve the plagiarism problem on their own. By adopting Turnitin at the district level, Grand Erie was able to subsidize the cost of the service for all of its schools, in support and training costs as well as licensing fees. As a result, they were able to ensure a level playing field for all the students in the district.

Doing Seventeen Things At Once

To launch Turnitin simultaneously at the district's seventeen secondary schools, Abbey identified a key teacher at each school to be the local champion and liaison to her office. Each key teacher attended a half-day training session to learn the system, set up accounts for each teacher at their school, and acquired the materials they would need to conduct local trainings.

By coordinating this at the district level, Abbey was able to take care of the administrative hurdles, which allowed the schools to get Turnitin into the classroom very efficiently. "If we had left this just to the schools, it would

"We wanted to make sure that all of our schools were able to use Turnitin. Some of the schools could have done this on their own, but other schools really needed our help getting set up. Now everyone is benefiting from it."

Lynn Abbey, Teacher Consultant, Grand Erie School District

have been more expensive, teachers may not have had the support they needed, and some schools would never have overcome inertia and made it happen," she said. "Instead, we were able to make a really positive change across the entire district at once."

One of the important aspects of the district-wide adoption was the fact that it didn't take anything away from the schools' ability to do what they wanted. Some schools use Turnitin for all papers in composition classes, and others use it more for spot-checking, while many schools use a combination of approaches. "The great thing is that the teachers can use this in the classroom however it works best for them."

Raising Standards For All Students

Since that first year, the district has left it up to the schools whether to continue using Turnitin, and most of them have not only continued using it, they have expanded its use on their campus. For Abbey, who has since returned to a teaching position, and uses Turnitin in her own classroom, the greatest aspect of the district's adoption of Turnitin has been its use as a teaching tool. It's not about "catching" cheating students; it's about teaching good scholarship and promoting academic honesty among the students.

"It's had a fantastic effect on the whole district – students are getting the writing skills they'll need when they get to the university, and the schools are getting a great tool subsidized for them," she says. "It's the kind of win-win that a school district is always on the lookout for."