

Interactive video creation sparks creativity and deeper learning in Eastern Virginia school district

WeVideo and PlayPosit offer full-scale video creation and interactive elements to engage students and improve learning retention.

When Sharon Shewbridge became director of instructional learning at Virginia Beach City Public Schools (VBCPS) in January 2020, she faced tight finances, a slew of subject- and grade-specific digital programs, and a pandemic that was about to turn traditional learning on its head.

“We had some great products, but with a limited budget I only wanted to implement products that were going to enhance classroom instruction and student responses, and benefit our students in the long run, not just offer fun,” Shewbridge recalls of her first few months on the job. “When we realized school would be closed longer than anticipated due to the pandemic, we wanted to provide our teachers with something they could use immediately to support building asynchronous and/or synchronous instructional opportunities for students.”

‘Constant learning’

PlayPosit and WeVideo “hit all the marks,” Shewbridge says. Today the products are available throughout the district—which is the 54th largest in the country.

With PlayPosit, students watch pre-recorded lessons, or “bulbs,” that have embedded questions to increase engagement and enable teachers to assess knowledge intake. Videos can be paused and repeated, and students can be redirected to more information or review sheets if they enter an incorrect answer.

“Teachers love to add feedback in the question loop,” says Matthew



Colohan, instructional technology coordinator at VBCPS. “It’s constant learning. Students like being able to rewatch videos at home where it’s quiet and they can pause and repeat.”

Support for project-based learning

WeVideo is a cloud-based editing platform that allows students to create and edit videos and podcasts. At VBCPS, the platform has most frequently been used for project-based learning, or to demonstrate mastery of a topic.

Says Shewbridge: “Students who have the opportunity to demonstrate their understanding of the learning material will always have higher retention of that knowledge than a student who just sits there and is told ‘This is what you need to know.’”

“A student actually solving a math problem with pictures, numbers and words is going to be more successful than a student who just figures out the steps in a process. They are

better equipped to handle any math question that comes to them.”

Easy entry point for new users

PlayPosit, which integrates seamlessly with over 20 learning management systems, provides a host of video interactions for different grades and subjects, a feature that is particularly attractive for new users, Colohan says. Educators can also share bulbs created by peers or district staff.

“Some of our curriculum leaders have been very intentional in building bulbs, and showing teachers what they can do with PlayPosit,” Shewbridge says. “They say, ‘Here’s a bulb you can share with students.’ It’s a safe way to try it out.”

Colohan says that once teachers try a bulb, see students engaging with content and review the data demonstrating student learning, they’re typically sold.

“That gets them started, and they realize, ‘I could do this with my own



content,” Colohan says. “As teachers learn the product, they layer in their own level of engagement.”

Small start, organic growth

The district first implemented PlayPosit in 2015 for flipped learning in about 100 high school government classes. It proved so successful that over the next few years, and as budget space opened, access was steadily expanded. Today, it’s available to all of the nearly 70,000 students in the district’s 86 schools.

WeVideo was added about three years ago, when the district went 1:1 and needed a video editing program for Chromebooks; the combination proved timely.

“Being 1:1 creates the space and opportunity for students to have equitable access to resources,” Shewbridge says. “And at the height of the pandemic, many of our instructional technology specialists were so pleased to have WeVideo because it was so easy for students to navigate. When you’re home and teachers can’t really be giving one-on-one tutorials, it is very powerful for students to be able to navigate and use WeVideo on their own.”

The average number of active users in Virginia Beach City increased 49% and the number of logins

increased 69% during the first two years using WeVideo.

Soft skills in the spotlight

“We’ve always had a big emphasis on student creativity and design,” says Colohan, “whether it be a one-minute video of a second grader demonstrating their reading ability, or a three-minute satire created by AP English students who spent months storyboarding and organizing digital content. The students are so proud and happy with their end product. And so much of the creation process uses the soft skills that we sometimes struggle to teach but are so important.”

The products also help with school communications, including enabling students to film professional-looking weather reports in front of a green screen, Colohan says. “It’s not unusual to go into an elementary school and see a third grader editing videos of the morning announcements or daily weather reports in WeVideo.”

WeVideo also plays an important role in podcasting, which the district has started exploring with students after purchasing professional recording equipment last year. “A lot of students just want to talk, so podcasting is a way to connect with them in their own world,” Colohan says.

“WeVideo has been such a powerful tool for students to edit their podcasts,” Shewbridge says. “As kids are getting more comfortable making podcasts, and as teachers use that equipment more, WeVideo becomes more integral to the process.”

Streamlined tech stack

As usage of PlayPosit and WeVideo has increased, the district’s tech stack has been streamlined. And while time and financial savings were realized, the true value of the platforms has been seen in the students, Colohan says.

“We gained a way to broaden student learning experiences and

foster their creativity,” Colohan says. “We can see that students are truly engaging in multiple aspects of the curriculum.”

Usage continues to expand beyond the classroom, with human resources and budgeting staff creating training bulbs, for example, Colohan notes. The professional development and online tutorials, along with support from the company, have been instrumental to success, he adds.

“It’s so intuitive that folks were running with it within a day or two,” Colohan says of PlayPosit. “Once you get the hang of adding questions, you can go much deeper, but the simplicity and ease of using the product really speak for themselves.”

Evergreen content

Many teachers use PlayPosit for flipped learning and content review, knowing it doesn’t matter when they recorded a particular bulb for it to be effective, Colohan says. “Whether they recorded a lesson or review that day or a year ago, students still have access and can watch as often as they want.”

“We don’t require use of either product, but the usage is high because our teachers love them,” Colohan adds. “We never had any pushback; there was a lot of buy-in from the grassroots level. In fact, if we went into a school and said we’re going to take them away, our teachers would revolt!”

The decision to implement the two video solutions continues to be validated, Shewbridge says. “WeVideo and PlayPosit are products that are going to benefit our students and teachers in the long term.”

To learn more, go to www.wevideo.com/education

