



Growing with Confidence and Consistency

NEW HOPE CHRISTIAN ACADEMY, OHIO

At the beginning of every school year, Rebecca McGinnis would climb Mt. Everest without a guide. She would sit at her desk in front of her school calendar, with just paper and pencil, to try to map lessons for the coming months.

She was a new teacher, too. So, on top of wrapping her head around the school year ahead, she was simultaneously striving to survive knowing the whole process would repeat the following year.

"It just seems very overwhelming...I definitely had feelings of, is this even something I can accomplish? Am I on pace? Am I on track? Is this an appropriate amount of time?" recalls the Social Sciences teacher at New Hope Christian Academy.

McGinnis was one of the teachers working at New Hope before the school first discovered the online lesson planner and gradebook used by 600,000+ teachers worldwide, and eventually the complete Unified Classroom® Curriculum and Instruction solution.

McGinnis was still relatively new to teaching when tasked with designing curriculums and lessons for high school classes that no teacher had previously taught at New Hope. That wasn't easy, she says.

"I was given the pacing guide that was in the text, and beyond that, it was just my own structure. I did look up a couple of other sample pacing guides from other schools or other curriculums, but it was very much a rough, pieced-together thing," she says.

And those pieced-together curriculums were pen-and-paper creations—meaning that, although they served her well at the beginning of the year, things could go off track quickly when she had to adjust for snow days, changes in schedule, or anything else that came up in the classroom.

AT A GLANCE



Challenges

- Piecemeal, pen-and-paper, day-by-day curriculums didn't allow for flexibility or scalability
- Difficulty designing curriculums and lessons for new grades as the school expanded, particularly for new teachers and substitutes
- Lack of alignment and sporadic collaboration, based on individual preference, ability, and time



Solution

- Unified Classroom® Curriculum and Instruction



Results

- An accessible and flexible online platform to help with planning
- Ability to bring over successful lessons from previous years—no more starting from scratch for new teachers or substitutes
- Ability to check for vertical and horizontal alignment, providing curriculum consistency between grades, subjects, years, and teachers

While veteran teachers or those who had good pedagogy may have been penning their curriculum maps, like McGinnis, many were planning day-by-day only. And, being a relatively small school, not every teacher had a counterpart to reach out to for help. "They might be the only ninth-grade social studies teacher or the only fourth-grade math teacher, so they may not have somebody to bounce ideas off of," says Kim Shepherd, New Hope's Elementary Principal.



New Hope needed a solution that would:

- Start new teachers off with confidence
- Provide a way to plan for new grade levels and subjects
- Offer a more straightforward method to organize the entire school year
- Encourage consistency in planning across the faculty
- Allow teachers the ability to adjust curriculum in response to unexpected changes
- Provide a solid starting point for planning each year and each class

Even with co-teachers, collaboration was sporadic, based on individual preference, ability, and time. "There wasn't a lot of consistency across the board. We were just kind of surviving at that point, picking and choosing what we could do."

Those day-by-day plans became cumbersome for administration, Shepherd adds. She would receive planning packets every week, but **not everyone was on the same page.** She did what she could, but "felt sometimes like [she] was just dumping some books in their lap and saying 'good luck'—there wasn't a great map or a plan to give them."

To further complicate matters, this happened when New Hope was going through a higher-than-usual period of turnover. **The school was hungry for a more reliable approach to curriculum mapping and lesson planning that would also start new faculty on the right foot.**

Step by Step, Win by Win

The following year, New Hope adopted Unified Classroom® Curriculum and Instruction across the board—from preschool to 12th grade.

"I think what stood out most was the simplicity of it," Shepherd remembers. She saw immense value in the way **teachers could input their curriculum and lesson details and produce an organized plan—color-coded and scheduled.** She also appreciated the accessibility and flexibility of an online platform (also available on iPhone, iPad, and Android devices) to help with planning anytime, anywhere.

But most importantly, she saw the potential to solve many of her school's challenges. For example, "the curriculum mapping feature was huge because we knew that was an area that we were lacking in," she says.

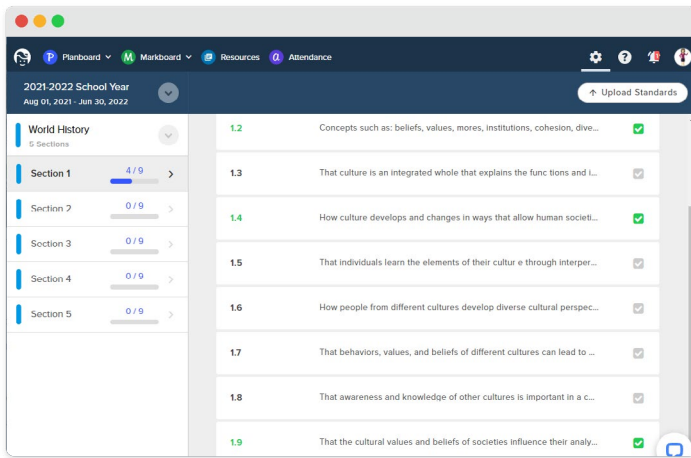
McGinnis was among the first to jump on board. "Unified Classroom® Curriculum and Instruction made it very easy to set up the whole structure of the year, the curriculum, the standards. And then you could very easily visualize what that would mean," she says. "I could put in how many lessons I typically do and literally see where the blanks are, see where the holes are in the standards."

"The unit view makes it really easy to move things around. I can put on the test and quickly bump it down if I feel like an activity might actually take us two days," she says.

Rather than thinking about every single class for the whole day, she was able to hyper-focus on just one class or one unit at a time, which made her planning process much smoother.

She no longer felt like she was flying by the seat of her pants. **Instead, she was aware of the gaps in her curriculum and her class's progression throughout the year.** "It's a very good feeling to be able to sit here and say, I covered what I was supposed to cover this year because [we hit] the standards checkpoint and I'm on pace with what I had set out," she says. "I know where I'm supposed to be, and I know where I am."

And Shepherd appreciates the consistency that's growing between grades, subjects, years, and teachers, particularly among some of her elementary classrooms where teachers educate across up to seven or eight subjects a day.



Provide clear visibility to standards coverage to inform lesson planning while ensuring students are receiving the instruction they need.

No more starting from scratch—teachers can bring over successful lessons from previous years. They're free to make changes based on their style or the students in the classroom.

That saves teachers time and energy, especially as curriculum maps and lesson plans improve over time, and it also **helps new teachers by giving them a strong starting point**. And it aids substitute teachers, too, who now have easy access to a well-thought-out resource that keeps students learning continuously.

With Curriculum Map Comparisons, teachers and administrators can check for vertical and horizontal alignment, too, Shepherd adds. "To be able to look at second grade and third grade and fourth grade together and look at where we are introducing multiplication and how it's being taught at each of those grade levels, is a really cool feature that I'm hoping to use more."

As Shepherd puts it, "the things that we knew were issues—substitute plans, vertical alignment, ensuring daily lesson plans are significant and sufficient—Unified Classroom® Curriculum and Instruction addressed."

Looking Forward with New Hope

For Shepherd, consistency has been one of the most valuable outcomes over the past seven years with Unified Classroom® Curriculum and Instruction.

"[It] brought in a level of confidence. I knew the work I was doing. I was not starting over next year," she says. And you'll find that same boost in confidence and consistency—along with the benefits that come from it—across the students and faculty.

"The students benefit from teachers being more confident and more secure in their plans. By nature of having solid lesson plans, it made the classroom experience better for the [students]."

"Rather than everybody doing their own thing, and it being hit-and-miss in the effectiveness of grade levels and coverage of standards, I can much more confidently say now: yes, we are teaching all of the fifth-grade science standards," she says. She knows what's covered because she can see it on the curriculum map.

But for McGinnis, the most significant payoff is her confidence when she enters a new school year. "I knew the work I was doing, I was not starting over," she says.

"It makes it more efficient and boosts my confidence—and then the attention can be put on other things that don't make that initial beginning of a school year or a new class as overwhelming."

How can Unified Classroom® Curriculum and Instruction help your school grow with confidence and consistency? Schedule a personalized demo to learn more.

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