

Online Learning Provides Equitable Learning Opportunities for Rural District

Challenge

Several years ago, Spartanburg County School District One in South Carolina began investigating online learning options for their district. They wanted to offer an effective credit recovery option, but also support the broader goal of providing equitable learning opportunities for all students.

The district wanted to provide students with access to digital curriculum that helped them master course material and get back on track for graduation while filling any learning gaps or work they may have missed. In addition, they were looking to offer new courses the district was previously unable to offer because they did not have a teacher available or because students wanted to graduate early.

Solution

Apex Learning was highly recommended to Spartanburg County Schools District One by partner school districts in their region. Today, the district uses Apex Learning for initial credit, credit recovery, and virtual learning.

Following a proven pedagogy using time-tested teaching and learning principles, Apex Learning provides a personalized learning experience with curriculum built to standards. Courses are developed to build both content mastery and confidence, keeping students interested and motivated to succeed. Courses incorporate interactive tools such as graphs, simulations, and objects that can be manipulated to help students better understand what's being taught.

“Our students have really taken advantage of the variety of offerings and the unique, personalized learning pathways available,” said Dr. Stephanie Mathis, Deputy Superintendent, Spartanburg County School District One. “We want to prepare our students for post-secondary support. After English, science, math, and social studies, we are limited in the number of options we can provide due to the number of teachers in our district. Now students are able to take online courses that support their post-secondary plans.”

“We implemented digital curriculum for the versatility of the course offerings and the ability to have a teacher managing the virtual lab with our students while the instruction was happening,” said Dr. Mathis. “We appreciate that we don’t have to worry about the quality of the instruction, and the teacher is there and available to assist students with questions and support them with time management strategies. The Apex Learning support has been phenomenal, and their willingness to come out to train us and offer guidance anytime we have a problem, even in real time, has been incredible.”

Learning Impact Outcomes

“As people have become more comfortable with our digital curriculum program, students and parents are asking how their students can participate,” said Beth Pace, Coordinator of Secondary and Middle School Curriculum. “They are really excited about the unique, individualized learning opportunities that Courses provide because everyone learns in a different way.”

“Digital curriculum has provided our students with the opportunity to manage a virtual system, obtain skills they will need after they graduate from high school, and take higher-level courses,” said Dr. Mathis. “Our students are doing all of this in a safe place with teachers, staff, and administrators

available to help. We could talk about every single student and the difference online learning has made in their lives because there are so many success stories. We regularly hear from parents that they are so glad their students have been given the opportunity to participate in the online courses. Taking online courses is also helping our students understand how to manage their own time.”

At first, the district used Apex Learning Courses for math and for students who were interested in taking courses for initial credit. Now there is an alternative school run out of the district office that has been incredibly successful, providing struggling students with another learning option that gives them the opportunity to succeed.

“If it weren’t for the alternative program using Apex courses, many of these students would not have graduated,” said Ms. Pace.

Return on investment

“As a small district, we don’t have a large budget, but we have carved out the funds for this because it has been so valuable to our students,” said Ms. Pace. “The program is expansive enough that one course equates to a first semester course taken in the traditional classroom. The rigor is fantastic for our students and dead on in terms of the level of preparation to ensure our kids are prepared for what’s next.”

The district has gone from 11 students enrolled in initial credit courses to well over 100, and more than 10 credit recovery classes were recovered last year through Apex Learning.

“Our digital program has grown tremendously,” said Dr. Mathis. “The first year we had 30 to 50 students enrolled in credit recovery courses, and then we began looking into additional opportunities to provide students with initial credit where we might not offer a course due to funding. This included a variety of electives, languages, and also the option to add Advanced Placement courses.”

“If we didn’t have this program, our graduation rate would be five to eight percent lower,” Dr. Mathis said. “I can think of times when we’ve had 30 to 50 students who would not have graduated if they did not have access to the online curriculum. If we didn’t have this program, it would certainly impact our graduation rate in a negative way.”

“For our advanced students, we are seeing a significant increase in dual enrollment because the digital curriculum is elevating the level of rigor and increasing student achievement in other classes,” said Dr. Mathias. “We are so grateful for Apex Learning and how the program is providing our students with confidence in their own abilities.”

“The cost was very doable for us. It wasn’t anything we didn’t feel like we could manage,” said Dr. Mathis. “We are a very small district with less than 5,000 students, so we have to really manage our resources. We made a concerted effort to move forward with a digital curriculum program because we believed it would make a big difference.”

“Apex Learning has made such a difference for our district and has had an incredible impact on our students, which is what it’s all about for us,” said Ms. Pace.