

Case Study

Appleton Central High School

APPLETON, WI

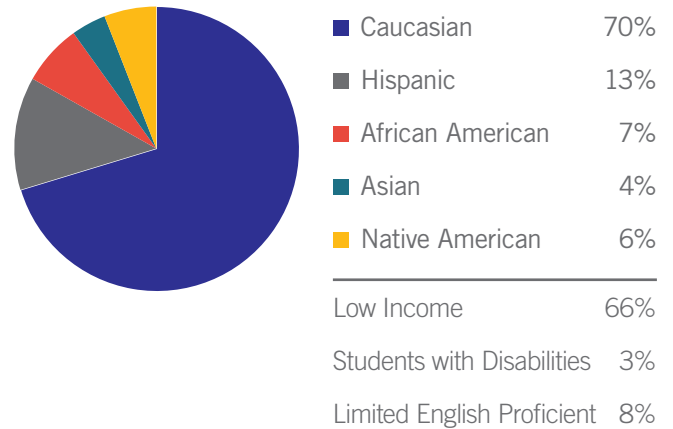
Can an online credit recovery program increase student engagement and decrease dropout rates?

Problem: Students with behavioral, social, and academic problems were failing in a traditional setting.

Solution: A rigorous, online program allowed students to master critical content material.

Outcome: Customized technology helped improve student graduation and dropout rates.

School Demographics



Background

Founded in 1996, Appleton Central High School (ACHS) is an alternative education program designed to serve students in Grades 7–12. ACHS’s student population is diverse. The majority of students are significantly credit deficient due to a range of factors including teen pregnancy, mental health concerns, academic delays, alcohol and drug abuse, criminal behavior, and poverty. ACHS also enrolls withdrawn and expelled students. Most entering students are at least 1.5 years behind grade level. ACHS’s mission is to “offer academic, physical, and emotional health educational opportunities for students in a small school environment,” while also “nurturing student motivation.” In 2009, ACHS felt its existing online program was not rigorous or engaging enough and began researching new online content delivery programs.

Setting High Expectations for All Students

Principal Katherine Crowley Peckham sought an online program that would set high expectations for students regardless of their backgrounds. She also wanted to ensure that the online program’s courses could support struggling students, be interactive, and tightly align to the Common Core State Standards. Peckham chose Edgenuity elective and core courses because they “were rigorous, current, and capitalized on graphics, sounds, and adaptive pacing to engage all learners.” Peckham also appreciated that Edgenuity courses went beyond simple multiple-choice tasks and required students to provide constructed responses with evidence. She particularly liked that students had to use writing skills to complete coursework.



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Edgenuity courses also provided more flexibility and more course options to keep students engaged and focused academically. Not only could Edgenuity course content be modified, but student feedback, grading, teacher review, assessment options, and start and end dates could be customized as well. Instead of just sitting and reading text materials, students were able to view online video clips of highly qualified teachers delivering direct instruction. Students could access the program anytime, anywhere. They could also learn at their own pace, taking notes, and rewinding the video to review a concept or lesson.

Peckham decided to implement Edgenuity courses for the Central Day, General Educational Development Option #2 program (GEDO#2) and Dan Spalding Academy (DSA) programs. Central Day students attended school three hours a day, five days a week. Depending on the semester and required courses, students generally completed at least one course using Edgenuity's math, language arts, science, social studies, and elective credit recovery courses in a computer lab during a 38-minute period.

Students over the age of 17 used Edgenuity to complete some of the requirements needed for entry into the GEDO#2. Additionally, students enrolled in DSA used Edgenuity's initial-credit core and elective courses to advance in their coursework while under expulsion.

While students worked through Edgenuity courses at their own pace, certified teachers and paraprofessionals used data from the learning management system to monitor student performance on assessments and writing activities. Based on student data, instructors were able to prioritize their time to answer questions about course content, monitor students' progress, review students' notes, assign grades, and confirm that students were actively mastering content material.

Strong Evidence of Success

Preliminary evidence indicated that Edgenuity courses are having a positive impact on ACHS student achievement. After one year of implementing Edgenuity courses along with other academic and social interventions, the four-year graduation rate of students in this program for at-risk students increased from 16 percent to 46 percent. Further, the dropout rate declined from 14 percent to 9 percent.

In addition, ACHS administrators observed that Edgenuity courses helped students adopt improved study habits. The built-in assignment calendar, progress bar, and online notebook refined students' time management skills, and the ability to pause, rewind, and replay instruction strengthened their listening skills. Additionally, eNotes and journals solidified their note-taking skills. Administrators observed students applying these skills outside the classroom by creating their own calendars to help manage their work and volunteer experiences.

The key to the program's success, according to Peckham, was blending Edgenuity's courses with teacher support. She explains, "When students realized they could work at their own pace and receive teacher support, they excelled. They finally felt they could be successful in school."