

Success Story

Caddo Virtual Academy

SHREVEPORT, LA

Grades: 9-12

Reach: 70+ students

Model: Virtual School

Impact: Increased graduation rates

Time Period: 2016-2019

Virtual School Makes Learning Personal

Faced with declining graduation rates, Southwood High School enlisted then assistant principal Tyron Lacy to create an online credit recovery program which would allow students to recover credits and graduate on time. As a result, Southwood's graduation rates went "through the roof" says Lacy, who later facilitated the expansion of the program district-wide. That program has now been up and running for over 10 years, and has expanded to offer initial credit and summer school options for Caddo School District students. With a taste of the power of online courses, Lacy decided to offer more options for Louisiana students, and in the summer of 2016 he began Caddo Virtual Academy (CVA). Here he takes us through his unique design and specific implementation so others can emulate his success.

STRATEGIC DESIGN

Now, just three years after CVA was founded, they are rated an A+ school and were recently given the top gains honoree award. But this success wasn't by accident. Lacy, now the principal of CVA, emphasizes the strategic, data-driven decisions he made to create this powerful learning environment. "We were purposeful in the things that we did. We didn't just throw it in the air and hope it works," Lacy said. For example, they used strategic hiring practices to ensure students have quality instructors. They also fostered relationships with local universities to provide students access to dual enrollment courses, as well as AP classes and SAT/ACT prep courses. These details have helped contribute to a successful, independent high school, which functions exactly like any other within Caddo School District. And unlike other virtual schools across the country that act as an alternative program within a traditional high school, CVA has their own campus, extracurricular activities, and even PTA – which helped get some of the first parents on board with this new program.



THE PERSONAL TOUCH

When students are first enrolled at CVA they go through a series of questions to set up an individualized graduation plan based on their specific needs. In fact, “We make it personal!” is the school’s motto, emblazoned on their website, and at the core of all they do. “All students learn differently, and every environment is not good for every student,” says Lacy, who believes that with proper support all students can achieve at their own rate. Furthermore, teachers customize their courses to match the Louisiana Department of Education’s requirements while also pushing the students to think critically and not allowing them to just blow through their assignments. With students ranging from academically gifted and looking for a challenge to those needing asynchronous schedules due to demanding extracurricular activities to those traditionally home schooled, CVA’s unique hybrid format provides support, structure, and plenty of student-teacher interaction.

“ [Students] see the passion behind our educators and it builds a culture of excellence that students want to be around.

UNIQUE FORMAT

“Even though we’re an online school, the majority of our students come to school every day,” says Lacy, astonished. “I think it’s the personal touch. They see the passion behind our educators and it builds a culture of excellence that students want to be around.” Unlike some online schools where students receive minimal personal interaction, CVA students get support immediately from their teachers as they complete their coursework. This feedback is available online, or through video streaming, and teachers are also available for office hours.

Additionally, students are required to attend weekly live lectures from their teachers either virtually or in person. “It’s just like a normal class,” Lacy says, “teachers take role, ask interactive questions, break students into groups,” and present the topics students will cover that week. Then, students have the rest of the week to complete the coursework in Edgenuity at their own pace. “No student is left behind, but no student has to wait either,” says Lacy, and he points out that the coursework is rigorous enough that no one is significantly ahead of the teacher.

LOOKING AHEAD

As word spreads of their unique model, support structures, and student success, enrollment at CVA has tripled. Seniors have been awarded millions in scholarships, students are earning college credit, and struggling learners are graduating on time. The district is taking notice of their success, and considering ways to provide additional space and support for the increasing number of students electing to enroll. “I’m excited about what we’re able to do for families and students,” says Lacy as he continues to dream of bigger and better ways to enable student success through the use of technology.