

# Success Story

## New Beginnings Program, Hoover High School

**HOOVER, ALABAMA**

**Model:** Blended learning in an alternative education program

**Goal:** Support student SEL needs while helping them reach graduation

**Grades:** 9–12

**Impact:** Five graduates in 2019

## Reimagining Education Technology to Support SEL

“The fact is, when you feel safe, loved, and understood, you will blossom.” Dr. Deborah Grant took these words to heart when she was tasked with building a unique education program for students within Hoover High School. Several years ago, the Hoover School District had an alternative program and a program for students with mental health issues called New Beginnings. The superintendent saw a need for the alternative education program but wasn’t sure where New Beginnings fit in. Luckily, Deborah Grant stepped in to restructure the program and give these students the support they need to blossom.

### **OFFERING EXTRA SUPPORT**

New Beginnings is a school within a school. For students dealing with complicated home issues, mental health diagnoses, or gender identity concerns, it may be difficult to navigate in a public-school setting with over 3,100 students. As Dr. Grant puts it, “It’s tough to be a teenager, but if you have a mental health diagnosis, it’s even harder.” And these students were isolated, often angry, and even felt like no one knew they existed. So, with her years of mental health experience and passion for working with young adults, Dr. Grant revamped New Beginnings and serves as the “anchor of the boat.”



With the help of Edgenuity, Dr. Grant can offer students the flexibility to learn and manage their social and emotional challenges. “If a student is having an anxiety attack or needs to be hospitalized, I have the flexibility to give them a down day and allow them to work at home to catch back up.” And by being in the room with the students all day every day, Dr. Grant worked to create an identity for the program, and make kids “proud to say I’m in New Beginnings.”

Subject matter teachers rotate in throughout the day to offer expertise in all of the core subjects and work one-on-one with the students on their particular coursework. Students from grades 9–12 are all working on the same subjects, but with content specific to their knowledge level. “I am the navigator,” says Dr. Grant, “and I deal with anyone with social or emotional issues and keep them directed.”

### **SCHOOL WITHIN A SCHOOL**

New Beginnings gives students who struggle with self-assurance the confidence to navigate the halls with poise. The group attended a mock trial with the entire school, and many even went to prom. “My kids feel as though they are a part of something bigger than themselves,” says Dr. Grant, while still touting that the personalized care they receive gives them the self-confidence to function within the larger school. And it doesn’t stop there. Dr. Grant focuses on life skills, community service projects, and job interview practice. “When we’re out in the school, they feel like a wolf pack, so they can go into the courtyard and be fine,” says Dr. Grant.

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### **SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING**

Dr. Grant believes that “a lot of inappropriate interactions are out of ignorance,” so she focuses a lot on multicultural awareness. “We talk about where we came from and what’s appropriate,” and how to “self-advocate while still being appropriate to others,” says Dr. Grant. Since many of these students have dysfunctional relationships with the adults in their lives, she teaches the correct way to speak to others. Ultimately she believes that social and emotional wellness comes from, “understanding who you are, where you came from, and what you stand for,” and she helps students define that for themselves.

### **MAKING THE GRADE**

When the superintendent questioned the need for a program like New Beginnings, parents petitioned the school board to keep it open. And luckily, Dr. Grant was available to provide the unique support these students needed by creating the right environment for them to succeed. Truancy issues have resolved, as Dr. Grant will call students if they have not arrived by 9:30. “Students know they are accountable, and I care,” she says, “so attendance has gone up astronomically.” This year, five New Beginnings students are graduating from Hoover High School, and all of the students are passing their classes. “We couldn’t do what we do without a program like Edgenuity,” says Dr. Grant, who touts the power of the flexibility provided by the online curriculum to build a customizable program for these extraordinary students.