

Success Story

Putnam County Schools

MADISONVILLE, TN

Grades: K–12

Reach: Over 11,000 students

Model: Personalized Learning

Impact: Improved ACT scores, increased graduation rates, future-ready students

Personalized Learning: Bringing Edtech Out of the Credit Recovery Lab

Edtech and credit recovery go hand-in-hand. Most educators can envision how to structure a credit recovery lab and many have already implemented one in their school or district. But Putnam County schools thought beyond the lab and brought technology into the hands of almost every student and teacher in their district.

DEFINING PERSONALIZED LEARNING

With the ambiguity around personalized learning, it is essential for schools and districts to define the term for themselves before attempting to implement it. For Putnam County Schools, personalized learning “empowers students with voice and choice in the learning process. It’s a student-centered approach that is facilitated by the teacher, based on each learner’s mastery,” says Sam Brooks, the personalized learning supervisor for the district. Using this definition, Putnam County focuses on giving teachers the ability to reach more students on an individual basis by using technology among other resources.

“A lot of schools are using blended learning, but if you can’t personalize it, then you’re just using technology in a classroom or digitizing traditional teaching,” continues Mr. Brooks. “We ask, what value does it give the student and the teacher?” To that end, the Putnam County schools use technology as a tool to help advance gifted students and remediate students who may have gaps in learning all while in the same classroom. Exposing all students to technology is essential in their district because, as Mr. Brooks points out, “technology is the focus for future jobs.”



THE IMPORTANCE OF EDUCATORS

Putnam County utilizes a team of dedicated technology specialists who learn the ins and outs of Edgenuity® before taking it to their schools and training teachers. Getting teachers onboard with a new process is sometimes difficult, since many see the addition as just another thing on their already overflowing list of responsibilities, but Putnam's technology specialists emphasize the time it can give them back in their day. Technology gives teachers the ability to reach those students that otherwise get left behind, and once they realize that, teachers are more receptive to the innovations. Edgenuity, paired with Google Classroom and other edtech, allows teachers to support standards in their classroom while differentiating instruction to reach every student. Mr. Brooks and the technology team tout Edgenuity's mastery-based materials as a way to give educators the ability to develop different uses for the same tools, like developing competency-based learning programs, which also gets teachers invested quickly because they can do things that they never could in a traditional classroom.

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MEASURES OF SUCCESS

The VITAL (Virtual Instruction to Accentuate Learning) Program, launched in 2009, provides even more opportunities for Tennessee students. As a full-time virtual school, VITAL has somewhat outgrown its name because now they focus on the personalized learning opportunities that are realized by using virtual instruction. While remaining at their home school, students can also take online classes through VITAL to augment their in-person education. Many 8th graders are taking high school courses, which will give them more course options and flexibility as they get older, and may even allow them to earn college credit while still in high school, if they choose to pursue that option.

Putnam County Schools focus on being able to give students outcomes that mean something like being a critical thinker, working in a team, and going through an interview to get a job. These are the things the VITAL program focuses on in addition to increasing graduation rates and ACT scores. Tennessee also increased Putnam County's score by 7.2% on the Career Readiness Report Card this year, which is a great indication of the successful outcomes being achieved through their virtual and blended programs.

