

Success Story

Upper Merion Vantage Academy

BRIDGEPORT, PENNSYLVANIA

Grades: 7–12

Model: Alternative Education Program

Time Period: 2014–2019

Reach: 10–30 students

Goal: Help struggling students achieve success

Impact: Increased graduation rates

One Program's Success with Non-Traditional Students

Four words represent the goal of [Upper Merion Vantage Academy](#): “Help students achieve success.” This alternative education program offers diverse options to students who are struggling in a traditional classroom. Upper Merion works with public school districts to connect with students who need an alternative schooling option, such as those in their fifth year of high school, young parents, and those who are working. Once these students are identified, Upper Merion shows them a path to graduation with the help of technology.

EMPOWERING STUDENTS

Program Director Amanda Heintzelman emphasizes the importance of empowering students to find their own path and accomplish the goals they set for themselves. And a customizable program is the only way to give these students the individual attention they need while adhering to the district's graduation requirements.

Upper Merion works with about 10 different school districts, accepting students who have been referred from their home school for a variety of reasons. Sometimes, their program is transitional for students, and gives them the support they need to get back on track, recover credits, and return to their home school. Other times, their program sees students through to graduation. In the first few weeks of attending Upper Merion, students are on campus for four hours a day, which allows them to



get familiar with the curriculum, work closely with content teachers, and develop a rapport with the lead teachers who oversee the program. If students are making significant progress and maintaining a C-level grade or better, they are allowed to work from home two days a week.

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MEETING INDIVIDUAL NEEDS

Because of the transitional nature of the program, students begin their courses with different levels of knowledge, and online courses help students to begin at their appropriate levels. Teachers can then catch students up as needed, ensuring they learn everything required while avoiding lesson redundancy. Edgenuity’s pretesting features and [expansive data visibility](#) help teachers understand where the students are, where they are struggling, and where they are excelling. With this crucial feedback, Upper Merion’s teachers can help their students exactly when and where they need it.. “Edgenuity is a very high-quality product and, as an administrator, I appreciate the accessibility to truly track where the students are and be able to intervene early and often when they fall off the boat,” Heintzelman explained.

GAINING AN EDGE WITH ELECTIVES

Edgenuity also enables Upper Merion to offer students [electives](#) that would otherwise be impossible for its small staff to accommodate, including Psychology and Introduction to Engineering. This partnership gives the students a breadth and depth of options that nine teachers and six periods a day couldn’t otherwise provide. As a result, students are exposed to courses that interest them most, keeping them engaged in school, and helping them learn about post-high school careers.

REACHING REAL MILESTONES

Upper Merion’s teachers, parents, and students all work together toward graduation by tracking milestones, which helps give students a sense of hope, something that is often lacking by the time students reach the academy. “The quality of the curriculum is great,” said Heintzelman and the incorporation of videos bridges the gap for students with low reading levels while still respecting them as learners. As a part of the [Lakeside](#) network of therapeutic schools, an organization that emphasizes a brain-based and trauma-informed approach to learning, Upper Merion works to change students’ mentality and open them to the possibility of graduation.

