

Case Study

Fast Track Virtual School

KETCHIKAN, AK

Can an online learning program provide increased access to rigorous curriculum?

Problem: High-quality courses were not uniformly available to students across Alaska.

Solution: Students were given the opportunity to take rigorous online core, credit recovery, elective, and career and technical education courses.

Outcome: Students completed a wide array of courses to which they would not otherwise have had access.

Background

Fast Track Virtual School (FTVS) is located in Ketchikan, Alaska, and is committed to meeting the learning needs of all Alaskan students. Alaska is the largest state in the United States, spanning nearly 590,000 square miles and two time zones. Most of the state's 54 school districts are rural and are accessible only by all-terrain vehicles, boats, dogsleds, or planes. As a result of its geographic isolation, many Alaskan schools have small teacher pools, which prevent them from offering core and elective courses to students.

In 2012, FTVS administrators decided to pilot Edgenuity courses with 200 middle and high school students from 23 districts across the state, as part of the Alaska Learning Network, the state's online learning coalition. The goal was to implement an online program that would not only provide credit recovery opportunities, but also offer electives and career and technical education courses to students.

Increasing Course Access

Students were allowed to enroll in Edgenuity's English language arts, mathematics, science, social studies, world languages, electives, and career and technical education courses. Whether in a computer lab at school or at home on a personal computer, students could access Edgenuity courses 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Students were expected to complete at least 6 percent of a course each week and complete an entire course in 18 weeks.



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The program enabled students living more than 1,500 miles from Ketchikan to gain access to a wide array of courses that were not available to them locally. “Most small rural schools cannot afford to hire a full-time algebra or foreign language teacher,” said Bill Whicker, FTVS Principal. “However, through Edgenuity we are not only able to offer core mathematics and world languages courses, but psychology and game design courses as well. There is no way Alaskan students would have access to this diverse range of courses without distance education and Edgenuity.”

Meeting the Needs of All Learners

Edgenuity courses were customized to meet the needs of all learners. Not only could course content be modified, but student feedback, grading, teacher review, assessment options, and start and end dates could be customized as well.

“I liked that Edgenuity courses could be customized and would provide more flexibility to students,” said Whicker. “Edgenuity’s diverse array of courses offered accelerated students the opportunity to excel and credit recovery students the chance to catch up with their peers.”

A detailed calendar enabled students to set individual goals and monitor how much work they should be completing each day. Rigorous content, assignments, and embedded tasks helped motivate students. Additionally, on-screen teachers explicitly demonstrated how the skills and knowledge taught could be applied beyond high school.

Learning scaffolds, such as translators, graphic organizers, highlighters, and notes, provided support for accessing content and synthesizing information. The learning platform gave students the ability to take notes and rewind a video to review a concept or lesson. These tools enabled students to work more independently and at their own pace.

Enabling Teachers to Be More Productive

FTVS teachers used real-time data from Edgenuity’s learning management system to set weekly progress goals, develop pacing guides, and monitor students’ performance. Both teachers and students routinely capitalized on Edgenuity e-mail and online chat to discuss attendance, course progress, and mastery of content. When students struggled, teachers hosted in-person or telephone meetings to address questions and provide alternate explanations of content.

Igniting Student Interest in Learning

Access to Edgenuity courses also exposed students to new and engaging electives and career paths. Whicker reported that the career and technical education courses ignited student interest in learning. Students liked that the audio engineering and digital arts courses were “project-based” and were “relevant to their career goals.” Many students finished their career and technical education electives ahead of schedule.

Preliminary evidence indicated that students were successful in the program. On average, students demonstrated an overall grade of 80 percent across all of their courses.