Success Story

Seneca Valley Academy of Choice

HARMONY, PENNSYLVANIA

Student Acceleration through Customized Courses

As online learning has exploded in the past several years, the demand for better, more flexible online learning solutions has increased exponentially. Seneca Valley Academy of Choice in Pennsylvania has been customizing their online learning offerings for over ten years to meet the needs of a diverse student body. With careful planning, creative thinking, and a faculty dedicated to blended learning, they’ve made tremendous strides in student acceleration by individualizing the online learning experience down to the student level.

MAKING THE MOST OF TECHNOLOGY

Seneca Valley School District consists of about 7,000 students, and nearly 3,000 of them are using Edgenuity for acceleration, credit recovery, and intervention. The district is 1:1 for kindergarten through 8th grade with a goal of being 1:1 for all students by next year. All students in 5th through 8th grade use MyPath™ for English and math until they pass their Keystone exams, and 9th and 10th graders use MyPath as a pretest. Students are then placed into their learning paths, and teachers can use their work in MyPath as practice questions for students, allowing students to earn grades based off that work.

Recently, the district also instituted flexible instructional days, or FIDs, to allow students to stay home on a school day and still complete their work. Teachers create mini-lessons in math, ELA, social studies, and science that take about 30–45 minutes, so snow days and other
absences don’t put students behind. While initially met with mixed reviews, the addition of these FIDs has actually created more scheduled holidays for students, like an Easter break. Plus they still include two snow days a year for students to ride their sleds.

Seneca Valley Academy of Choice takes technology one step further by offering courses fully online. About 800 students take online courses through the academy each semester, and they have two therapeutic classrooms for students who require mental health support. The Academy of Choice also uses virtual instruction for students who are out of school because of suspensions or expulsions. Students complete their coursework online while they’re away from campus, and can then return to the traditional setting, allowing them to receive more education than they otherwise would.

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THE TOOLS OF ACADEMIC ACCELERATION

As the Academy of Choice increased their flexibility and opportunity, they discovered an even greater demand for online course offerings. Principal Denise Manganello says, “Everybody wants more, so we’re trying to find that happy medium without overwhelming people with too many options.” Her faculty and staff closely monitor individual student needs to ensure students are placed in the correct classes. Manganello explained that because acceleration begins around the 3rd grade, students can progress to a level that’s years ahead. “Right now, I have an 8th grader taking AP® Calculus AB, so we need to make sure letting them accelerate that much is the best option for their learning,” Manganello said.

One of the keys to the program’s success has been using customization tools to create a seamless transition for students coming back and forth between virtual and traditional instruction. “We love the customization tools,” Manganello said. “We break all our classes into 9-week periods, so we’ve been able to mirror that in our online courses using the customization tools.”

The academy has also added some of their own content, such as syllabi and welcome videos so students can make a face-to-face connection with their teachers. Some teachers are adding graduation projects, essays, and research pieces. Special education teachers can add in notes and other things to help the curriculum match up to students’ IEPs. Additionally, they’ve added a health course to meet a new Pennsylvania requirement that students learn about suicide prevention.

“We want to provide our students with more learning opportunities, so we’ve also created mini-courses from existing courses. We built an astronomy course from existing material in science courses. We want to give kids as many opportunities as possible for career and college readiness,” says Manganello.

As their name suggests, Seneca Valley Academy of Choice is dedicated to giving students a wide range of learning choices to prepare them for career and college readiness. The flexibility of blended learning and the ease of customization tools, allows them to meet a wide range of student needs, expand their course offerings, and facilitate accelerated learning in a way that maximizes student success.