

WHITE PAPER

Summer Programs Meet Diverse Needs

Innovative Trends in Summer Program Redesign

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Innovative districts are expanding their summer programs beyond traditional remediation of course failure to meet a wide range of student learning needs. These innovative programs include options to earn initial course credit, prepare for college entrance exams, and remediate gaps in the prerequisite knowledge needed for success in the upcoming grade level. Effective summer programs increase equity and opportunity by offering a range of options that serve increasingly diverse student populations across grade levels.

The evolution of “summer school”

Historically, summer school primarily served students needing to recover lost course credit to get back on track for on-time graduation. Students attended school for four to eight weeks to repeat up to two courses and receive credit toward graduation. These traditional “repeater courses” offered students a standard, condensed scope and sequence; focusing instruction on the essential skills and concepts in the course.

More recently, forward-thinking districts have introduced digital curriculum to support credit recovery efforts and to personalize student learning through prescriptive assessment. This innovation has enabled competency-based progression, and allowed for extended work outside of school time. Students can now work at their own pace, potentially faster than the pace of the class. The shift to digital curriculum also allows teachers to facilitate more than one course within a single classroom section, potentially saving districts thousands of dollars in staffing costs.

As more districts have come to embrace the flexibility and benefits digital curriculum offers, many are turning to these tools to expand summer learning opportunities to a wider range of students, while continuing to meet the needs of students who did not pass a course.

Summer program trends

As districts begin to leverage digital curriculum during the summer to provide educational opportunities for students with a variety of learning objectives, three key trends are dominating the field.

1. Provide flexible opportunities to earn initial course credit
2. Remediate gaps in prerequisite knowledge prior to advancing grade levels
3. Increase college and career readiness

Trend 1: Provide flexible opportunities to earn initial course credit

Summer programs can give all students a head start in the coming school year. Students who did not struggle with academic content in the previous school year may choose to participate in summer programs for a variety of reasons, including:

- A desire to graduate early
- Qualifying to participate in early college or dual enrollment courses
- Making time in the upcoming school year schedule for specific courses or work-study experiences

When summer programs are expanded to include opportunities to complete courses for initial credit toward graduation, the use of digital curriculum in blended and virtual environments allow for more students to be included. Schools can also realize significant cost savings compared to traditional summer offerings because each teacher is able to support more students. Students meet with teachers periodically for instruction, progress check-ins, lab activities, and for assessment proctoring.

Robust digital curriculum offers several benefits for students as well. Because digital curriculum enables online learning, students can work on lessons and activities from any device with Internet access, in a location and time of their choosing. Online or blended learning summer programs can meet the needs of students who are unable to physically attend classes at specific times due to transportation issues, life circumstances, or summer jobs.

Summer program profile

Fullerton Joint Unified School District, California

Swimming, cookouts, and health education — a perfect summertime blend

Incoming freshmen get a jump-start on health education requirements and learn valuable skills before their first day of high school

In 2016, updated content standards for health education took effect in California. Fullerton Joint Unified School District saw summer as the perfect time to help incoming freshmen transition to high school and get a jump-start on completing graduation requirements before school even began. However, it can be tough to convince students to spend summertime sitting in class, so the district decided to offer the course virtually. By offering an online option, students could complete the course at their own pace, when and where it was convenient for them. To ensure equitable access for all students, the district offered the option to use a school computer lab in addition to a fully virtual option.

While the two-week, standards-based Health course fulfills the new California Healthy Youth Act standards, the course also provides students with a unique online learning experience. “Students are used to being passive and waiting to be told what the answer is,” shared Lisa Valdes, Online Learning Department Chair for iSierra Online Academy. “The online health program pushes these soon-to-be high schoolers out of their comfort zones and starts to teach them how to problem solve and take ownership of their learning.” Because the health content isn’t quite as rigorous as other online courses, it’s a good opportunity for students to practice online learning skills such as taking exams, interacting with teachers and other students, submitting assignments, and other tasks needed to excel in high school, college, and the workplace.

Fullerton Joint USD offers online learning to students through the iSierra Online Academy so they already had the infrastructure in place to offer the new health course online. Since 2010, the district has partnered with Apex Learning to develop courses that challenge students, enrich learning, and meet standards. According to Valdes, “The California Healthy Youth Act standards are very specific. We wanted to make sure the course we offered really addressed them so we worked with Apex Learning to build a course directly based on the standards.”

After just its first year, the virtual Health course option was deemed a success. In fact, the district will offer it again during summer 2017. Administrators were pleasantly surprised by completion and passing rates. Nearly 75% of the 2016 incoming ninth graders enrolled in and completed the Health course requirement. Students reported that they appreciated the flexibility the course gave them to learn anywhere, even while on vacation. They also liked that they had ownership of their learning and that the digital curriculum enabled them to work at their own pace. “We’re very happy with how well the program worked for everyone,” said Valdes.

Trend 2: Remediate gaps in prerequisite knowledge prior to advancing grade levels

Research indicates that many students are underprepared for high school and need support to succeed due to weak foundations in prerequisite concepts. As many of these students enter high school, they experience early patterns of failure that can lead to the belief they will not be able to earn a high school diploma. Without effective forms of intervention and support, these reinforcing patterns of failure can cause students to fall further behind and eventually drop out of school.

When educators fail to intervene with struggling students at the middle-school level, those students are likely to struggle even more in high school. In fact, poor performance in middle school is a key indicator of a student's likelihood of dropping out of high school.¹ Ninth grade is a particularly pivotal year for students. Ninth graders have the lowest grade point averages, the most missed classes, most failing grades, and more behavior-based disciplinary referrals than other high school grade levels.²

Innovative districts across the country are changing the trajectory of at-risk middle school students through summer programs. Students identified as performing below grade level are invited to participate in summer remediation programs where they are given an opportunity to learn and strengthen the prerequisite skills and foundational concepts needed for success at the next grade level. These proactive intervention programs increase the number of students really ready for high school, and help end the cycle of academic failure for many students.

Trend 3: Increase college and career readiness

Under ESSA, states are required to implement strategies to increase the number of students who are ready to take on college-level coursework before they enroll in college. While colleges and universities offer remedial classes to students who don't meet the standards, these institutions are looking to high schools to provide students with the necessary academic foundation and skills before they receive a high school diploma. Similarly, trade schools and businesses expect students with high school diplomas to possess skills that will enable them to quickly pick up the tools of their trade.

The lack of college readiness has long-term negative consequences. One in three freshmen will not complete their first year of college.³ When students take remedial classes before taking credit-bearing college classes, the likelihood that they will drop out of college during their freshmen year increases by 74%.⁴

Districts are offering programs during the summer to prepare high school students for college entrance exams. In these programs, digital curriculum is leveraged to provide prescriptive assessment that delivers a personalized learning plan with adaptive remediation for each student. Students work at their own pace to achieve mastery of the concepts they most need. Students participating in these programs report an increase in their ACT®, SAT®, and ACCUPLACER® scores, which may improve their chances of entering the college or university of their choice and increase scholarship opportunities.

Summer Program Resources

For more information, Apex Learning offers the following publications:

- [Designing Summer Programs in Districts With Diverse Needs:](#)
How to effectively implement digital curriculum to improve outcomes for all students enrolled in summer programs
- [More Learning Happens With High Quality Digital Curriculum](#)

Conclusion

Summer learning time has great potential. In the past, summer school was typically reserved for students who had fallen behind. Now, innovative districts are also leveraging the summertime to help students get ahead, address knowledge skill gaps prior to grade promotion, and improve college and career readiness.

Districts can get the most out of summer learning time when programs are expanded to reach more students. Digital curriculum offers great options to meet the differing needs of students. Combining digital curriculum with summer programs allows students to work in a variety of locations and on their own schedules to pursue academic goals, free of the constraints of a traditional school day and classroom. In addition, districts are realizing increased graduation rates while ensuring students are [really ready](#) for college, life, and work.

About the authors

Michelle Rutherford

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Michelle leads a team of implementation success managers who work with districts across the nation to maximize student outcomes. Michelle is focused on identifying and sharing ideal implementation models and best practices for personalized learning programs. She also designs services to help district and school administrators plan and evaluate their programs, and to support the development of specific skills and strategies for teaching with a digital curriculum. Prior to joining Apex Learning, Michelle served as an Instructional Technology Interventionist and Blended Learning Program Coordinator for Dorchester School District Two in South Carolina. Michelle began her career in education as a biology teacher in 2001. She holds an undergraduate degree in secondary science education from the University of North Florida, and a master's degree in educational technology from Lesley University. She has also attained National Board Certification (AYA Biology). Michelle has presented personalized learning models and best practices at numerous district, state, and national conferences.

Denise Kelly Stinson

Director of Standards Alignment, Apex Learning

Denise has extensive experience as a teacher, administrator, and curriculum developer. Denise began teaching in a Title I resource program for students with language delays and later moved into teaching social studies and English language arts at the middle school level. She then began developing content for a number of publishers as a contract writer, while continuing to teach for a private learning center specializing in working with students with learning disabilities. Denise later went to work full-time for a digital content developer that eventually was bought by Pearson. After a number of years, she decided to return to the field and became the Curriculum Director for a national company that managed charter schools in seven states. While working for the charter school organization, Denise was asked to find a new digital curricular resource that had a full course catalog with all courses required for high school graduation and that would prepare at-risk students for success on high-stakes and exit-level exams. After working with the Apex Learning digital curriculum and staff, Denise decided to return to the publishing world. She is now the Director of Standards Alignment at Apex Learning where her role ensures the development of standards-based courses and content.



About Apex Learning

Apex Learning puts rigorous, standard-based curriculum within reach for all students—from those struggling to those capable of acceleration—to prepare them for the next course, the next stage in their education, work and life. Schools use Apex Learning digital curriculum because it is proven that more learning happens with the powerful, actionable data that gives educators insight into student performance, and the personalization and engagement students need to succeed. During the 2015-2016 school year, there were more than three million enrollments in Apex Learning Comprehensive Courses for original credit and credit recovery and Adaptive Tutorials for intervention, remediation, and to prepare for high-stakes assessments. Headquartered in Seattle, Apex Learning is accredited by AdvancEd and its courses are approved for National Collegiate Athletic Association eligibility.

For more information, visit <http://www.apexlearning.com> or call 1.800.453.1454.

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