



CASE STUDY

Personalized Learning Supports the Transition from Middle School to High School

Dorchester School District Two, South Carolina

Challenge

Dorchester School District Two sets a high bar for high school readiness; however, the district found that some incoming ninth graders were better prepared for high school than others. Simply passing a class in middle school was not enough for students to successfully transition to high school.

Goal

- Teach students how to be online learners with a growth mindset.
- Implement consistent measurement of student achievement across all middle schools.
- Provide the tools and training to help teachers differentiate instruction for all their students.

Solution

Dorchester partnered with Apex Learning to provide a personalized learning experience across the district. Students now have access to high-quality digital curriculum built to state standards. Teachers can immediately identify learning gaps, provide targeted remediation, and help students build content mastery.

Results

Teachers are finding that students are more prepared for the next grade level. Apex Learning Adaptive Tutorials foster independent learning, support differentiated practice, and help students develop the higher order thinking skills necessary for success in high school.

District Profile 2016

- 4-Year Graduation Rate: 87.8%
- 25,345 Students
- Suburban District Economically Disadvantaged: 48.2%
- Students with Disabilities: 10.7%
- 3 high schools: 6,100 students

District Demographics

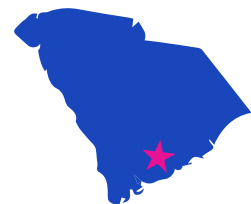
- White: 56%
- Black: 30.2%
- Hispanic: 6.4%
- Two or more races: 5.2%
- Asian: 1.7%
- Pacific Islander: 0.2%
- Native American: 0.3%

Solution

- Comprehensive Courses
- Tutorials

Implementation

- Blended Learning
- Virtual Learning



Improving the Bridge Between Eighth and Ninth Grade

Dorchester School District Two takes a comprehensive approach to preparing middle school students for the academic rigor and social challenges of high school. Rather than simply sending eighth graders off to high school and hoping for the best, Dorchester created the structure and tools to ensure students have the foundational skills and knowledge they need to successfully transition from middle school to high school.

This involved a learning process for both students and teachers. Middle school teachers become familiar with the ninth-grade curriculum so they understand the skills students need to master and the level of rigor required. In turn, ninth-grade teachers develop a clearer understanding of what students are expected to learn from the eighth-grade curriculum. Middle school and high school teachers observe each other's classrooms, discuss how middle school standards feed into high school standards, and work together to support students during the critical transition from middle school to high school.

“We can’t wait until someone gets to high school to identify that they have not gotten the skills they need to be successful.”

Julie Kornahrens

Assistant Superintendent

Providing Key Skills for High School and Postsecondary Success

The rigor of Apex Learning digital curriculum ensures that students can meet state standards, as well as the expectations for the next grade. Tutorials are used in both middle school and high school; therefore, when students advance from eighth grade to ninth grade, they're already comfortable with an online learning environment. A weekly lab rotation gives middle school students the opportunity to take high school level English 1, Algebra 1, and Geometry to accelerate their learning.

Teacher Support Is Critical

Dorchester has created a structured program for professional development that fosters collaboration and support among middle school and high school teachers. Teacher cohorts pair experienced teachers with their newer colleagues and high school teachers with those from the “feeder” middle schools.

With better measurement tools in place, there is more consistency across grades and schools when it comes to grading and academic rigor. “It’s important to have great tools that are high quality and support teacher efforts,” said Kelly Purvis, Middle School Curriculum Coordinator.

Contact

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Dorchester School District Two has partnered with Apex Learning for over seven years, starting with a program to provide intervention and credit recovery. Read the case study to learn how this program improved graduation rates and lowered dropout rates by offering more intervention options.

