



CASE STUDY

Digital Curriculum Helps Students Choose to Succeed

Hartford Public Schools, Connecticut

Challenge

Hartford Public Schools faced a rising dropout rate as students with a diverse set of learning needs and socioeconomic challenges struggled to remain engaged and stay in school.

Goal

Seeking to increase re-engagement and graduation rates, the school district envisioned launching the Choosing to Succeed High School Graduation Initiative in three intervention high schools to engage at-risk students and returning dropouts with a highly personalized, student-centered approach to learning.

Solution

The High School Graduation Initiative at Hartford Public Schools combined research-based, nationally vetted best practices for online blended learning for credit recovery with Apex Learning digital curriculum to maximize teacher effectiveness, differentiate instruction, and provide a personalized path to success for each student.

Results

Of the at-risk students who participated, an average of 87.2 percent (from 2011 to 2014) earned the credits they needed to graduate with a high school diploma.

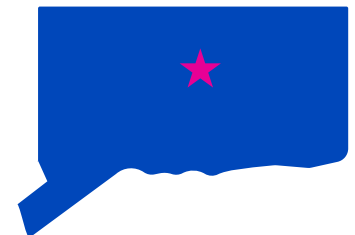
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APEX CREDITS

EARNED TOWARD GRADUATION DURING THE 2013-2014 SCHOOL YEAR

District Profile

- Urban district in Hartford, CT
- Approx. 21,565 PK-12 students
- 86% free or reduced lunch



Identifying the Need for Change

Hartford Public Schools serves a diverse student body with a broad range of challenges that could lead to students dropping out of high school. With approximately 86 percent of students receiving free or reduced lunch as well as students who face a wide array of individual challenges from adjudication to pregnancy and/or parenting, the district saw the need for a holistic approach to address the diverse needs of its at-risk students, both inside and outside of the classroom.

In response, Hartford Public Schools launched the Choosing to Succeed High School Graduation Initiative to ensure that every student — regardless of his or her life circumstances or individual level of academic readiness — has access to the instruction and support needed to succeed and graduate.

Providing Personalized Paths to Success

Today, the initiative's three Student Success Centers provide an alternative to the traditional classroom environment. Recognizing that students come to class with varying levels of proficiency, the centers utilize digital curriculum, predominantly from Apex Learning, to provide a student-centered learning experience that meets the needs of each student based on the student's individual skill level. A balance of scaffolded direct instruction, meaningful practice, and formative assessment supports all students in mastering rigorous content. Utilizing the flexibility of technology to meet students where they are and develop their capacities, the online blended learning program and Apex Learning digital curriculum make the educational experience inclusive and effective for every student.

In addition to differentiating instruction for each student, graduation specialists are assigned to serve as mentors, working individually with students to craft personal plans for success. To promote focused study and maximize the time students have with their teachers, class sizes are capped at 15 students. Staff members use technology and social media, conduct home visits, and partner with community organizations to ensure students stay in touch and engaged outside of the classroom.

Maximizing Teacher Impact with Blended Learning

To accentuate what its teachers do best, the initiative uses Apex Learning digital curriculum in a blended learning model. Apex Learning enables teachers to monitor performance in realtime and to intervene at critical points when students are in need of additional assistance.

For teachers, an important paradigm shift takes place as they transform their role from lecturers to academic coaches with the ability to provide informed one-on-one, small group, and full classroom instruction. The result is a streamlined approach that helps each student to succeed and each teacher to efficiently utilize their time while providing necessary interventions. For Hartford Public Schools, the results are clear: where students previously chose to drop out, students now overwhelmingly choose their individual paths to success.

“We see the benefits of this program in the changed lives of our students.”

Sonia Dinnall

Executive Director of College and Career Readiness, Hartford Public Schools

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