Best Practices: Planning Digital Curriculum Programs

Introduction

This document is designed to help leadership teams plan programs that use Apex Learning digital curriculum to provide differentiated instruction, intervention, test preparation, original credit, and credit recovery opportunities in blended and virtual environments.

Contents

Program Leadership

Primary Considerations

- Who will manage the implementation and coordinate a uniform program?
- What are the program mission and goals?
- Who will coordinate staff development?
- Who will ensure state and district requirements are met?
- How will the program be monitored and evaluated?
- How will communication with stakeholders take place?

Program Coordinator

The program coordinator oversees the implementation; communicates with stakeholders, establishes measurable goals; monitors and reports progress to district and school administration.

Successful programs are led by a district-level coordinator and school administrators working in collaboration with counselors, curriculum specialists, and teachers. The program coordinator is a central point of contact, resolves implementation issues, coordinates professional development, answers questions related to policies and procedures, analyzes data, evaluates success, and communicates results to stakeholders.

Read: Staff Roles and Responsibilities

Mission and Goals

Program Mission

A mission statement communicates the vision, serves as a reference point for participants, and inspires success. A mission statement briefly describes:

- The purpose of the program and the problems the program is attempting to resolve
- The metrics used to measure program progress and success
- The students the program will serve

Sample Mission Statements

The mission of the Credit Recovery Program is to increase the graduation rate by reaching under credited students to provide alternative pathways to earn a high school diploma.

The mission of the Virtual School Program is to provide flexible scheduling options for students whose graduation needs conflict with the traditional schedule by providing online course offerings.

Program Goals

The primary goal of most digital curriculum programs is to provide equitable access to high quality educational options resulting in graduation and college, and career readiness.

Performance

- Increase graduation rate
- Dropout prevention
- Reduce course failure
- Increase achievement on EOC/EOG exams
- Increase achievement on AP exams
- Prepare students for college and career

Equity

- Improve academic support for students who cannot physically attend high school
- Increase enrollment in AP
- Increase course options and availability
- Identify and address learning gaps
- Support EL and exceptional learners

Implementation Timeline

Our Success Manager partners with you to plan and ensure the ongoing success of your program.

THE FOUR STAGES OF IMPLEMENTATION

PLAN
EVALUATE
PREPARE
DEVELOP
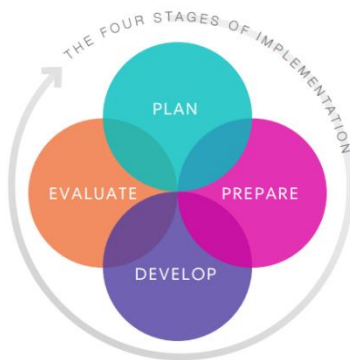
Plan
Identify goals, priorities, policies, and procedures.

Prepare
Explore best practices for using digital curriculum, data, and learning management tools.

Develop
Build operational efficiency and expand instructional and administrative expertise.

Evaluate
Assess success and chart a path to optimize results.

Monitoring and Evaluation

Program coordinators monitor programs, share success, and intervene when issues arise. Use the following methods to check in with administrators, teachers, and students.

Observations
Visit classrooms, identify successful strategies, and celebrate success. Listen to teacher and student feedback and provide constructive solutions to resolve frustration and concerns.

Site Coordinator Dashboard
Site coordinators monitor utilization (enrolled students/enrollments) for each site through the dashboard.

Reports
Usage reports provide enrollment and completion data that can be aggregated by district or school. Progress reports include information regarding access, progress, and performance. Session reports include session time, date and time of access, and activities completed. Additional reports are available by speaking to your success manager.

Surveys

- Student - Gather feedback by linking to a short survey from Custom Activities.
- Staff - Gather qualitative feedback regarding policies, procedures, and program effectiveness.

Communicate Policies, Procedures, and Results

- Email timely helpful tips, tricks, and reminders.
- Communicate progress, expectations, due dates, exams, and final grades.
- Send monthly email updates showcasing student success stories and course completion rates.
- Organize showcase events for community members and parents, such as information nights.
- Post information related to programs on school and district websites.

Best Practices
- ✓ Appoint a program coordinator.
- ✓ Create a mission statement.
- ✓ Define measurable goals.
- ✓ Set and follow an implementation timeline.
- ✓ Offer professional learning opportunities for staff throughout the year.
- ✓ Conduct a mid and end of year program evaluation.

Designing Instructional Models

Primary Considerations

- How many students will be served? What are their instructional needs?
- Which assessment model best supports student achievement?
- Will courses be delivered in a blended or virtual environment?
- What personnel, technical, and physical resources are available?
- What are the requirements for student/teacher ratios?
- How much flexibility can be created in the master schedule?
- Will summative assessments be proctored?

Continuum of Dimensions for Digital Curriculum Programs

The U.S. DOE's National Educational Technology Plan calls for learning models that offer engaging, empowering, and personalized learning experiences. Apex Learning digital curriculum provides teachers with assessment tools to reveal data to drive instruction and diagnose learning gaps. The combination of student-centered curriculum and teacher tools enables students to learn, complete courses, and graduate ready to succeed in college and career. There are many configurations for digital curriculum programs. Each implementation should choose the appropriate place on the continuum for each dimension based upon available resources and program goals.

Table 1: Continuum of Dimensions for Digital Curriculum Programs

Dimension				
Credit Type	Original Credit			Credit Recovery
Location	School			Home
Instructional Method	Face-to-face			Fully online
Delivery Time	Synchronous			Asynchronous
Instructor Qualifications	Qualified teacher			Teaching assistant / Mentor
Student-Teacher Interaction	High			Low
Curriculum	Fixed			Individualized
Assessment	Performance-based			Competency-based
Scheduling	One course per period			Any course any time

Adapted from Matthew Wicks, A National Primer on K-12 Online Learning, October 2010.

Staff Roles and Responsibilities

Program Coordinator

- Lead the development and communication of district-wide policies and procedures.
- Coordinate internal and external communications including marketing efforts.
- Maintain documentation including information on school websites.
- Acquire and distribute course materials.
- Oversee user account management, classroom creation, content modification, and settings.
- Develop the application and approval process with school counselors and administration.
- Oversee course enrollment.
- Transfer user enrollments between schools as needed.
- Serve as a liaison between curriculum and technology departments.
- Establish instructional and curricular consistency.
- Monitor and protect the integrity and fidelity of each program.
- Serve as a liaison between school sites, the District, and Apex Learning.
- Oversee the process for documentation of attendance for virtual school students.
- Oversee course completion procedures and coordinate documentation on student transcripts.
- Coordinate with school counselors to confirm graduation requirements are met.
- Communicate with staff to ensure required exams are administered.

School Site Coordinator

- Supervise and administer the program at their site.
- Provide input regarding the selection, evaluation, development, and retention of staff.
- Provide consultation, direction, and assistance to faculty and students.
- Oversee the admissions process and approve all student enrollments.
- Conduct student intervention conferences.
- Provide leadership in the development of the educational program in the school.
- Foster effective home/school/community partnerships.

School Counselor

- Assist with course selection and enrollment and maintain transcripts and academic records.
- Help students learn about various careers and about career planning skills.
- Provide advisory and individual counseling assistance to students.
- Collaborate with school staff to assist students with developing skills that support academic achievement, high school graduation, and lifelong learning.
- Help students who exhibit attendance, academic, or behavioral problems and encourage parental involvement.

Teacher

- Establish an environment of mutual respect where students are encouraged and supported.
- Modify instructional resources for students with varying backgrounds and special needs.
- Grade work and provide instruction to students in adherence with policies and procedures.
- Provide face-to-face or web conferencing for small group and individual instruction.
- Provide timely, formative feedback on student work.
- Provide appropriate intervention and direct instruction to assist struggling students.
- Communicate student performance regularly with students, parents, and school staff.
- Provide motivation and encouragement to all students.
- Help students to problem solve, set goals, and plan and pace their learning.

- Proctor designated assessments and ensure academic integrity.
- Maintain timely records of student performance.
- Issue grades in the Apex Learning Grade Book and the student information system.

Support Staff

Support staff members may be necessary for virtual and other non-traditional schools.

- Perform general front office management and secretarial duties.
- Receipt and deposit funds record financial transactions, audit, and balance school accounts.
- Order supplies and equipment.
- Document attendance, student records and other reports as requested by leadership.
- Prepare letters to parents for admissions, academic contracts, and other school communication.
- Supervise students working during school hours and proctor student exams.

Table 2: Recommended Staffing Allocations for a Diploma-Granting Virtual School

Position	Recommended Allocation*
Administrator / Program Coordinator	1
School Counselor	1: 450 students
Teacher	1: 150 students
Special Education Teacher	1: 75 students with an IEP/504
Support Staff	1

* Mandated school staffing ratios and other general school requirements vary by state.

Blended Learning Models

According to the USDOE's evaluation of Evidence-Based Practices in Online Learning, instruction combining online, and teacher-directed instruction is more effective than face-to-face or online instruction alone. Learning outcomes increase when students have opportunities to work collaboratively and when teachers provide guidance. Many programs host a student center with workstations where teachers are available for tutoring, progress checks, and assessment proctoring. Identify students in need of intervention and set time for web conference or face-to-face meetings.

Read: Planning Blended Learning Programs[1]

Assessment Models

Apex Learning courses can be configured for performance- or competency-based models.

Performance-Based

Students using a performance-based-assessment model earn grades for coursework in a traditional manner. In this model, students do not have the opportunity to retake assessments. They receive the grade earned on their first and only attempt unless the teacher resets the assignment.

Disabling Mastery-Based-Learning (MBL) allows open access to course content not specifically hidden in the outline manager. Allowing students to access course content in random order (instead of sequential) may be important in programs where students do not work on all content or complete units in sequence.

Main Characteristics:

- Students have access to all course content

---

1 http://cdn.apexlearning.com/documents/BP_Starting-Blended-Learning-Programs.pdf

- Students may work out of sequence
- Students may not self-reset un-mastered quizzes

Competency-Based (Mastery-Based Learning)

Enabling MBL restricts access to further course content until the specified mastery level on computer scored assessments is demonstrated (e.g. 75%). In this model, students are allowed between one and three attempts to demonstrate content mastery before progressing to the next unit.

Main Characteristics:

- Sequential content access
- Minimum student performance required before progression
- Students self-reset on un-mastered quizzes

Pedagogical models that can be implemented using MBL:

- Sequential content: A Mastery Level of 0% ensures sequential access. Completing a computer-scored assessment will unlock the next subset of course content.
- Minimum performance: A low Mastery Level (e.g., 60%) provides a minimal performance requirement ensuring that students sufficiently understand material to earn a passing grade.

> *Prescriptive unit pre-tests allow progress without completion of all course content in areas where students can demonstrate mastery.*

Resetting Assessments and Intervention

Classrooms with MBL enabled may allow students to self-reset on quizzes. This option can be modified to allow 0-3 attempts before required teacher intervention. Students may not self-reset proctored tests. Students who score lower than the mastery level on a proctored test will be "locked out" and require teacher intervention.

Intervention options for students who are "locked out":

- Quizzes: Ask students to submit completed study sheets, practice assignments, notes, study guides, and/or participate in a tutoring session before resetting.
- Tests: Review test results to identify un-mastered skills and provide remediation before resetting.

Teachers have three options for progressing students past un-mastered assessments:

- Provide an additional attempt by resetting the activity.
- Unlock the next block of content by using permit progress (no change to the assessment score).
- Override the assessment scores to a value equal to the mastery-level required.

Best Practices

- ✓ Choose staff roles and responsibilities to best suit the dimensions of your implementation.
- ✓ Choose a performance or competency-based assessment model.
- ✓ Provide opportunities for struggling students to receive individual or small group instruction.
- ✓ Set and communicate rules for the maximum number of resets for quizzes and tests.

Curriculum

Primary Considerations

- Which courses (and pathways) will be offered for each program?
- Who will align Apex Learning courses with district needs and recommend modifications?
- Is seat-time required in the state?
- Will modifications be made to the Apex Learning course outline?
- How does each course's instructional design affect customization options?
- What type of science laboratory experience is appropriate?

Apex Learning Digital Curriculum Overview

Apex Learning® provides teachers with solutions to support all students in achieving high expectations, meeting educational goals in a range of ways. Engaging, active learning experiences, supports and scaffolding make academic content accessible to all students.

Tutorials

Whether the goal is to enhance instruction, provide remediation, or ensure every student meets the expectations of the standards, Apex Learning Tutorials meet diverse learning needs.

Tutorials personalize learning with **prescriptive pretests** and adaptive learning plans containing prerequisite and grade-level content modules. The innovative module structure builds knowledge, develops critical thinking skills, and deepens understanding.

Real-time data serves as a gauge for teachers to evaluate student mastery of the standards.

Courses

Each course contains a complete course of study with breadth of standards coverage, depth of instruction, and integrated assessment. Used for credit, courses engage students in active learning to develop critical thinking and prepare them for college and career.

Courses' extensive learning management system empowers teachers to monitor progress, communicate, receive work electronically, provide formative feedback, and tailor instruction. Flexible reporting provides real-time data related to progress and performance.

Courses are designed to ensure the rigorous material required to meet the standards is accessible to students at all levels of academic readiness.

- **Foundations:** Students unprepared for grade-level challenges benefit from remediation.
- **Prescriptive:** Features in these courses allow students to accelerate past mastered concepts.
- **General Studies:** Standards-based courses with scaffolds to support academic success.
- **Advanced Placement:** Authorized by the College Board, these courses prepare students to demonstrate achievement on AP exams.

Course List

Apex Learning offers a robust [curriculum catalog](#)[2]. Consider creating a [curriculum map](#)[3] to illustrate a four-year program of study.

Determine which courses will be offered and create a course list to make the relationship between the district course and the Apex Learning course title clear. The course list can establish uniform naming conventions and enable program-based reporting.

A prefix before the course name may be used to signify the program. For example, CR English I would identify all credit recovery English I courses throughout the district.

Table 1: Sample Course List

District Title	Apex Learning Title	Pathway	Course Code	Classroom Name
English 9	English 9	Core	01001	CR English 9

Pathway Placement

Placement guidelines help to ensure appropriate course enrollment and are influenced by:

- Courses offered
- Credit type
- Student readiness: reading levels /skill levels

Table 4: Quick Reference Guide for Pathway Placement

Pathway	Foundations	General Studies		Advanced Placement
Content	Skills remediation in reading, writing, science, and math	Literacy support, scaffolding of grade-level content, and performance tasks		Approved by the College Board
Audience	Transitioning from middle to high school Performing below grade level	Students prepared for high-school curriculum		Highly motivated
Duration (hours / semester)	70 – 90	60 – 90*		120

Prescriptive features in these courses may be enabled to allow students to accelerate past previously mastered material resulting in variable and potentially shorter durations.

---

[2] https://www.apexlearning.com/digital-curriculum/courses/catalog

[3] http://cdn.apexlearning.com/documents/Curriculum-Map.pdf

Modifying Course Content

Course Design and Correlation to Standards

Apex Learning® curriculum is built from the standards and includes a variety of activities to engage, instruct, and assess learning. Modifying course content changes instructional scaffolding and can impact learning. Carefully consider learning outcomes and standards coverage prior to modifying a course.

Individualized Instruction and Student-Level Modifications

In addition to modifying course content to match program-level goals, it is important to define the extent to which teachers will individualize instruction by modifying course content.

For example, in credit recovery students may have previously mastered certain concepts; however, the concepts one student has mastered will be different from those another student has mastered. In this example, it may be appropriate to use prescriptive courses.

Students with an IEP or a 504 plan may also be accommodated with student-level modifications.

Time and Resource Restraints

Many leaders struggle with a lack of resources that may factor into the decision to modify course content. For example, some programs initially consider exclusion of teacher-scored assessments because of the time required for students to complete and for teachers to grade these activities. Conversely, few implementations opt for widespread exclusion of direct instruction activities.

The exclusion of an entire activity type, such as Teacher-Scored Tests or Practices, compromises the balance and rigor of the curriculum. For this reason, Apex Learning advises against this practice and recommends judicious exclusion of select activities based on program goals and resources.

Course-Level Modifications

Each course is structured as units, lessons, and activities. Teachers may use Outline Manager to hide activities from the student view of the course and simultaneously exclude activities from the Grade Book.

Content modifications made to one course do not affect other classrooms containing the same course. This flexibility allows a single course to be tailored to meet significantly different needs.

Teachers may create custom activities that will display in the course outline and in the Grade Book.

Assessments

Modifying content does not dynamically change assessments. For example, if a lesson is removed from the course, the unit assessment will present question items from the removed content.

Removing assessments from course content should be carefully balanced with respect to learning objectives and the opportunities both computer-scored and teacher-scored assessments present.

- Teacher-scored assessments present open-ended tasks which evaluate higher-order thinking that is difficult to capture through computer-scored activities alone.
- Computer-scored assessments dynamically generate activity reports that detail students' mastery of concepts and facilitate individualized instruction planning.

The decision to remove assessments must also consider how student progress is monitored and how students will satisfy completion requirements (e.g., overall performance, or completion of exams).

Science Laboratory Activity Options

Apex Learning offers wet and dry lab experiences to meet the needs of science students regardless of their setting or access to supervised laboratory facilities.

It is recommended that students complete a wet lab to gain hands-on experience. Many original credit programs require students to complete wet labs to qualify for lab science credit.

Students enrolled in AP courses are required to complete wet lab experiences. Some colleges will only grant credit to students who have completed the hands-on labs and may require a completed lab manual or lab notebook as proof of lab experiments. Contact the college(s) for complete credit requirements.

If a supervised laboratory is not available, students may complete a dry lab for most lab activities.

Dry labs teach students to work with experimental data and draw conclusions based on evidence.

> *Lab Materials and safety information can be accessed via Appendix A: Student Resources*

Offering Labs to Students Working Asynchronously and/or at a Distance

There are many ways to offer labs. Consider assigning a combination of wet and dry labs. Determine which wet labs will be offered and schedule times when supervision is available.

Table 6: Example Laboratory Schedule

Course	Available Labs	Instructor	Location	Day	Times
Biology	Unit 1: Making a Rip-O-Meter	Ms. Smith	B102	M	10:00-1:00

Best Practices

- ✓ Create a course list that maps Apex Learning titles with district course offerings.
- ✓ Identify different programs by naming classrooms with a prefix — such as CR for credit recovery.
- ✓ Make course modifications judiciously in consideration of time, design, and standards coverage.
- ✓ Choose wet and/or dry lab activities for science courses.

Scheduling and Enrollment

Primary Considerations

- When and how often will students be admitted to the program?
- Who will recommend, identify, and admit students to the program?
- Will students need to be eligible to participate in division I or II athletics?
- How many students may participate in each time period?
- How many courses are students permitted to take at one time?
- How long will students be given to complete a course?
- Will a fee be charged for courses?

Enrollment Periods

There are several options for allowing students to enroll in courses dependent on the way courses are structured. Choose one or a combination of the following enrollment period examples:

- Open enrollment
- Open enrollment for special groups (e.g. medically homebound, long-term suspension)
- Quarterly enrollment periods
- Beginning of the school year/ summer school

Consider the time students are allotted to complete courses and if extensions are permitted.

Student Eligibility / Selection Criteria

Eligibility criteria are used to identify the students who may participate in the program. While unique to each program, entrance criteria frequently include the following:

- Student residency
- Academic performance
- Trends such as attendance and behavior
- Personal goals and challenges
- Student age or grade-level

Generally, there are two approaches to communicating entrance criteria and recruiting students. In some cases, blends of these two approaches are used.

- Student applies: In some implementations, it is appropriate and desirable for students to demonstrate initiative by applying to the program. In this scenario, entrance criteria are communicated to eligible students prior to the application process. Student applications also allow management of enrollment limitations when not enough Apex Learning licenses are available for all students who wish to participate.
- Student is recommended: In other implementations, it is most effective for staff members to recruit students to the program. In this scenario, entrance criteria are communicated to staff members. Staff members, such as school counselors, use the criteria and their knowledge of student academic performance and behavior to recommend students to the program.

When determining which students to recommend for enrollment, consider the following:

- If the number of participants is limited, which students will be given priority?
- Will the number of courses a student may enroll in be limited?
- Has the student participated in the program previously? Were they successful?
- Does the student have access to a computer and the internet?
- Does the student show motivation to participate in class activities?
- Does the student have the capacity to work independently and to request help when needed?
- Does the student have the discipline to work to deadlines?
- Does the student intend to participate in athletics at a division I or division II college or university?

NCAA Eligibility

Student-athletes who wish to attend an NCAA Division I or II college or university must ensure courses offered using a digital curriculum for original credit and credit recovery meet NCAA guidelines.

NCAA explicitly requires that students complete all work in a course, therefore students seeking NCAA eligibility should complete the entire course without any form of test-out.

Read Best Practices: NCAA Eligibility[4]

Scheduling

Students who participate in digital curriculum courses may work at their own pace from any device with internet access. Because students do not finish courses at the same time, staff may need to adjust schedules throughout the school year. Plan the master schedule to allow flexible course movement.

A key factor in scheduling is the course delivery method. Consider the following:

- Will courses be offered using a blended or virtual model?
- How many days per week will students meet with teachers?
- Will students be scheduled in courses as a part of the school day?
- Will courses be scheduled on a block or traditionally?
- How will students access tutoring and take proctored assessments?
- When and where will students participate in science labs?
- For credit recovery, will prescriptive pretests be used to allow unit test-out?
- Is the assessment model competency-based or performance-based? (MBL enabled/disabled)
- When possible, schedule students in like subject areas and courses at the same time.
- Generally, students working 5 hours / week should complete a semester course in 12-18 weeks.

---

[4] http://cdn.apexlearning.com/documents/Best-Practices_NCAA.pdf

Attendance Requirements

Consider the time a student spends working on assignments and/or the number of assignments completed when documenting attendance. It may be necessary for students to attend face-to-face or web sessions with a counselor, teacher, or lab instructor for:

- Orientation
- Assessment proctoring
- Tutoring
- Science laboratory
- State, district, grade level, and course exams
- Weekly progress meetings
- Students placed on an academic intervention contract

Proctoring Summative Assessments

Summative assessments should be proctored after students complete all unit lessons and activities. Include computer- and teacher-scored unit tests, and semester and final exams. The following methods are used for proctoring assessments:

- During a scheduled day or time.
- During an open lab schedule.

Scheduling Hands-On Science Labs

Choose times to make labs available to students participating in lab science courses. Offer more than one lab at a time and post a schedule for students. Certified science teachers may supervise the lab.

Table 7: Sample Science Laboratory Schedule

September Science Laboratory Schedule					
Course	Available Labs	Instructor	Location	Day	Times
Biology	Unit 1: Making a Rip-O-Meter	Ms. Smith	B102	M	10:00-1:00
Chemistry	Unit 1: Physical and Chemical Change	Mr. Jones	B102	T	10:00-1:00
AP Chemistry	Unit 1: Measurement and Uncertainty	Ms. King	B103	T	1:00-4:00
AP Physics B	Unit 2: Gravitational Free Fall	Ms. King	B103	W	1:00-4:00

Fees

In most cases students are not charged a fee for courses as a part of the regular schedule.
However, sometimes a fee is charged for instruction beyond the normal time for course completion.

- Course application/registration
- Science laboratory
- Summer school course
- Course extension

Assess fees per course and collect with the student application (consider fee waivers as necessary).

Best Practices

- ✓ Establish, document, and communicate policies and procedures for each program.
- ✓ Plan the master schedule to allow maximum flexibility for student course movement.
- ✓ Allow opportunities for proctored summative assessments, science labs, and tutoring.
- ✓ Group students by subject area and/or course whenever possible.

Classrooms, Accounts, and Enrollments

Primary Considerations

- Who will create classrooms, user accounts, and enroll students? How will these tasks be performed?
- How will usernames and temporary passwords be distributed?
- Which account, classroom, and enrollment permissions will be enforced through settings and policies?

Classroom Setup

A classroom's configuration determines how teachers are assigned, students are enrolled, students access courses and assessments, and how data is reported.

- A single course can be used in multiple classrooms (e.g. 1ˢᵗ period Alg. 1, 2ⁿᵈ period Alg. 1, etc.).
- A single classroom can contain multiple courses. It is recommended that each course be placed within its own classroom unless two Apex Learning courses make a single district course.
- The teacher(s) and student(s) assigned to a classroom are assigned to all courses within the classroom.
- Each course within a classroom can be customized in terms of content.
- Course Settings are configured to control how students access course content and assessments.

Naming Classrooms

Classroom names appear in multiple locations, including the dashboard and reports. Consider naming conventions that include program identifiers and implement these conventions consistently.

Course Settings: Managing Access to Content

To support flexibility, most settings can be applied and changed at the course level. Default course settings can also be applied to new classrooms. It is important to communicate course settings to staff.

Access to Assessments

Control access to assessments with proctoring, restrict course content, question feedback, and review of completed assessments, to increase academic integrity; especially when multiple assessment attempts are permitted. Set clear requirements for the number of assessment attempts permitted, work a student must demonstrate before additional attempts are allowed and how teachers progress students past un-mastered assessments.

Table 5: Recommended Default Course Settings

Description	Configuration		
	OC	CR	AP
Mastery-Based Learning (MBL) students work through course content sequentially, earning at least the stated minimum score on computer-scored assessments.	70%	70%	0%
MBL Attempts is the number of times a student may attempt to master an assessment before being blocked from accessing subsequent course content.	2	2	0
Closed Book controls access to course content during assessment.	Closed-book assessments		
Student Overview	All Staff		
Discussion Forums	Allow		

Text-to-speech and Translation	Allow
Question Feedback informs a student if a submitted answer on a quiz is correct or incorrect. When an answer is incorrect SF provides the correct answer.	Do not show question feedback
Answer Review enables students to review graded assessments.	Allow answer review
Proctoring prevents access to activities until they are unlocked by a teacher or mentor.	Proctor CSTs, TSTs, Exams, Pretests Enforce Auto-proctoring
Course Review controls access to courses completed in the Grade Book.	Do not allow
Answer Reveal shows answers to study sheets when enabled	Do not allow
Due Dates	Cascade from the gradebook
Auto Withdrawal	90 days
Course Settings	Remove
Outline Manager	Remove if master courses are used
Pretest Settings- Enhanced credit recovery features only **Pretest Test-out level** Pretest score required for mastery. **Allow Unit Test-out** Permits test-out of *all unit* activities – including key activities-based on passing the pretest. **Require Pretest** Locks unit content until the pretest is complete.	Test-out level 70% Allow unit test out Require pretests Note: Pretests are proctored

* Unit recovery programs disable MBL because lessons and activities are assigned out of sequence and not all units are assigned.

** Virtual and AP courses set MBL at 0 to ensure students complete activities in sequence and are never locked out.

*** Language and AP courses do not contain question banks. Set MBL at 0 and do not show question feedback.

User Roles and Accounts

Each person with an Apex Learning account is assigned a user role. The user's role defines tasks that can be performed. The four roles are site coordinator, teacher, mentor, and student.

Permissions Cascade

A user may be assigned more than one role. For example, site coordinators are sometimes also teachers. When assigned multiple roles, the user has all permissions and data views associated with each role.

Restricting Teachers

Organizations may choose to restrict teacher permissions by disabling the outline manager, classroom settings, and classroom controls. These are program-level settings applied by Apex Learning Support. These settings prevent teachers from performing the following tasks:

Outline Manager

- Adding and/or removing course content from the student view.

Classroom Settings

- Changing classroom MBL and other settings described in Table 5 above.

Classroom Controls

- Create a student account
- Create a classroom
- Change the classroom name
- Assign/remove teachers in a classroom
- Enroll/withdraw students in a classroom

- Add/remove courses in a classroom

Regardless of restrictions, teachers may always perform the following actions for existing classrooms:

- Enter, reset, and update activity scores
- Lock and unlock proctored activities
- Set due dates

The Mentor Role

The mentor role allows users to view student progress in the Grade Book and unlock proctored assessments. Mentors cannot enter, reset, or change grades.

Methods of Account Creation

Manual Creation

All user account creation can be performed manually; however manually creating accounts will not allow entry of a unique identifier. In addition, accounts created manually cannot be updated using the Batch Import method. For this reason, Apex Learning advises against manual account creation.

Batch Import:

Easily create multiple user accounts in the Apex Learning system by completing a spreadsheet and uploading the file for processing. The following activities can be performed via Batch Import:

- Student and teacher account creation
- Classroom creation
- Student and teacher enrollment/ withdrawal

Application Program Interface (API)

Clients can integrate their student information system (SIS) with Apex Learning through API. This method requires programming to configure. Apex Learning does not offer this service but will provide technical requirements to programmers. An Operations Manager will help clients assess the appropriateness of integration.

Read: System Recommendations[5]

Best Practices

- ✓ Prior to creating users and classrooms, consult with Apex Learning Support.
- ✓ Establish and communicate policies for course settings.
- ✓ Use Batch Import or API to create user accounts, classrooms, and initially enroll users in classrooms. Manage subsequent enrollments manually.

Monitoring Student Progress

Primary Considerations

- How will teachers and students track and communicate progress?
- What procedures will be followed to signify completion and to award a grade?

Grade Book

The Apex Learning Grade Book centralizes classroom record keeping and student management functions. Teachers use the Grade Book to manage student scores and grades, course calendars,

---

[5] http://cdn.apexlearning.com/documents/systemrecommendations.pdf

assigned activities, settings for assessment behavior, and academic integrity. Double click the score to reveal information about the quiz or test including:

- Average attempts to master
- Time spent taking the quiz or test
- Activity history (displays the results of each attempt)

Due Dates

Setting due dates is an important tool in pacing, monitoring, and communicating student progress through reports. The following metrics are affected by due dates:

- On Schedule Percent
- Grade to Date
- Overdue Activities

Due dates may be set for all scored activities. Cascade due dates so that the first scored assignment is due within the first week of the program and the requested end date for all assignments is one week before the end of the semester.

Teacher/Mentor/Student Dashboard

Monitor progress through the classroom overview page which provides a snapshot of performance including:

- Grade to Date (click through to access the Activity Scores Report)
- Progress Bar (hover to see the percentage of the course completed)
- Work is on schedule (indicated by a stoplight color on the progress bar)
- Overdue Activities (click for a list of activities overdue)
- Last Access Date

Course Reports

The LMS features a proprietary web-based reporting system that presents administrators, teachers, parents, and mentors with real-time data related to student progress, performance, and time on task. The interfaces feature drag-and-drop controls allowing users to expand and manipulate data for comparative analysis. Additionally, all reports may be downloaded as spreadsheets for further customization through spreadsheet editors like Microsoft Excel.

Tutorials Reports

Directly from their dashboards, teachers and administrators access real-time progress and performance data at the student, classroom, school, and district level to make informed decisions. Progress and performance data are reported by prerequisite skill, percent complete, and by state standard.

Administrators access utilization data aggregated at the school and district levels to ensure full use of the solution. For students, real-time progress and performance data shows them where they are in their learning and what they should do next.

Access to data is role-based, ensuring that each teacher and administrator has access only to the student information for which they are authorized.

All reports may be downloaded for further analysis and customization through spreadsheet applications such as Microsoft Excel. Additionally, Apex Learning has a data analytics team that regularly creates custom reports to meet specific client needs.

Helping Students Manage Their Progress

Student Dashboard

Students monitor progress through the dashboard which provides a snapshot of their performance:

- Grade to Date and Quality of Work (click through to access the Activity Scores Report)

- Percentage of the course completed (hover to see the percentage of the course completed)
- Work is on schedule (indicated by a stoplight color on the progress bar)
- Overdue Activities (click for a list of activities overdue)

Student Portfolio

In addition to monitoring daily progress online, students should maintain a portfolio with written work, including notes and study guides.

- Print the Activity Scores Report as the first page, which lists each graded assignment and the corresponding due date.
- All student written work must be kept in the portfolio.

Teachers can use the portfolio to check in with students in periodic meetings to review student progress toward course completion, and to provide early intervention for students who fall behind.

Communication

Set up parents to receive progress updates using the coach feature. In addition, contact the parents of any student falling below 80% on schedule. The following are additional methods of communication:

- Websites
- Email/phone calls
- Parent information nights
- Student progress meetings

Coach Report

The Coach email is sent on Sundays and includes progress information for each course, including:

- On schedule indicator
- Quality of Work/Grade to Date
- Last access date

The Detail Report link includes current and historical information about access and activities.

Course Completion

Teachers should enter a final grade in the Grade Book upon completion of a course. Entering a final grade allows the following to occur:

- The student enrollment is marked complete in all reports.
- The student enrollment no longer counts toward student access limits.
- Course Review is set, if this setting is disabled, students will no longer have access to the course.

End of Course Test Requirements

Many states require students to take and pass one or more end of course assessments as a part of the graduation requirements. In many cases, this requirement only applies to original credit courses. Schools should take care to reference and follow all state regulations regarding end of course tests. In some cases, the final grade is affected by the end of course exam score.

Calculating Final Grades

The Apex Learning Grade Book calculates Unit Averages based upon total points. When due dates are used, the Grade to Date column displays a student's course average for completed activities through the current date based upon total points. Schools may use the Grade to Date as the final grade upon student course completion or factor unit averages into the district grading policy. In some cases, such as credit recovery, students are given a standard replacement grade regardless of the student score in the course.

Example 1: Original Credit

The district grading policy requires that the final exam / EOC score count as 20% of the final grade.

Grade to Date	Final Exam Score	Final Grade

900/1000 = 90%	80/100 = 80%	90 x 0.8 + 80 x 0.2 = 88%

Example 2: Credit Recovery

The district grading policy requires students to prove content mastery at a minimum level of 70% and students earn a replacement grade of 70%

Grade to Date	Final Exam Score	Final Grade
900/1000 = 90%	80/100 = 80%	70%

Grade Changes

Determine a uniform mastery requirement and grade for recovered credits. Once students demonstrate the required level of mastery, teachers fill out a grade change form and submit it to the program administrator for approval and documentation in the student information system.

Transcripts

In most cases, original credit courses are listed on the transcript in the same manner as a traditional course. Options for listing credit recovery courses on the student transcript include:

- Replace the failing grade on the transcript with a pre-determined numeric grade, the grade the student earns in the course, or "pass".
- Create a new line on the transcript with a pre-determined numeric grade, the grade the student earns in the course, or "pass".

Best Practices

- ✓ Set due dates to ensure proper progress reporting.
- ✓ Have students maintain student portfolios with all written work.
- ✓ Review progress each week. Ask students to show their progress bar for a motivational check in.
- ✓ Add coach e-mail addresses to student profiles to enable the weekly student progress coach report.
- ✓ Establish and communicate district grading policies.
- ✓ Enter final grades in the Apex Learning Grade Book to ensure proper reporting of course completions.
- ✓ Enter completed courses on the student transcript.

Classroom Management

Primary Considerations

- How will students be made aware of policies and procedures?
- What materials will be required to support online learning?
- How will the program maintain academic integrity?
- Will students demonstrate completed work, such as study sheets, before taking assessments?
- When will students be permitted to access Apex Learning assessments?
- How can faculty and staff support student motivation?

Classroom Layout

Design of your space will depend on the following factors:

- Laptop vs. desktop computers
- Number of computers/students in the room

- Model of instruction

The following strategies will assist teachers in maintaining an effective learning environment:

- Position student computers so that all monitors are visible to the teacher.
- Seat students according to course (i.e. Geometry on one row, Algebra 1 on another row, etc.).
- Move students requiring individual instruction and monitoring within close proximity.
- Identify students taking a summative assessment by placing a red cup on their desk or designate computers close to the teacher for taking assessments.
- Walk around the room.

Classroom Materials

Determine a process for managing classroom materials. The following materials may be used:

- Printer and Paper
- Headphones or ear buds (World Languages must have headphones and a microphone)
- Folders or binders for student written work
- Some courses require materials such as English novels, calculators, or lab materials.

Course Materials Lists: http://cdn.apexlearning.com/documents/materials_list.pdf
Bookstore: http://bookstore.mbsdirect.net/apexlearning.htm
Paperless Courses: http://cdn.apexlearning.com/documents/BP_Assignment-Sheets.pdf

Student Orientation

Require an on-site student orientation during the first enrollment week. Explain policies and procedures and discuss expectations for student work including:

- Student work portfolio
- Due dates
- Policy for quiz resets, what is required, number of resets allowed, etc.
- Watch the Student Guided Tour with students
- Demonstrate how to submit written work, participate in discussions, and use the message center
- Discuss academic integrity and have students complete an Acceptable Use Agreement
- Distribute student usernames and temporary password using the Student Roster
- Help students sign in and change their passwords
- Set up parents as coaches to receive a weekly student progress email for their student

Academic Integrity

Teaching with a digital curriculum presents new classroom management challenges. Digital curriculum enables new models of instruction that offer a higher degree of individualization to better meet the needs of each student. However, students may have access to information that provides them with an inappropriate advantage when completing coursework.

Concerns about academic integrity — such as ensuring that the work a student submits is his or her own and that the Final grade awarded to a student is based on that student's completion of the required course material — are not new, nor are such concerns unique to online learning.

The following best practices will help to discourage academic dishonesty:

- Set and communicate clear academic expectations
- Prevent unauthorized access to staff accounts
- Use recommended course settings
- Block question and answer web sites, and configure firewalls and content filters
- Proctor and protect assessments, and investigate suspected dishonesty

- Adjust classroom layout to enable teacher view of student screens
- Require offline student work portfolios

Read: [Academic Integrity Best Practices](#)[6]

Students Working from Home

Allowing students to access courses from outside the organization's network, such as from a home computer, increases the likelihood that students will be able to access undesirable web content.

The ability to access web content is of special concern during assessments. The most powerful tool for controlling access to assessments is proctoring. With proctoring, students can be permitted to work on un-scored activities at any time and be restricted from viewing or taking assessments.

What to Look Out For

Characteristics of dishonesty include:

- Disproportionate time spent on assessments vs. instructional content
- Unusually short assessment durations
- Low score on the first assessment attempt and a high score on a subsequent attempt
- Large amounts of perfect scores
- Score entries by unexpected users

The following reports can help identify these characteristics:

- Student Session Report for Site Coordinators
- Weekly Activity Report for Teachers
- Student Activity Details Report for Teachers
- Course Activity Scores Report for Teachers & Mentors

Configure Course Settings to Discourage Cheating

The following course settings support teachers and administrators in ensuring academic integrity:

- Proctor Summative Assessments
- Disable Answer Review and Course Review

Teacher-Scored Assessments

In all Apex Learning courses except AP Exam Review, there are two versions of every teacher-scored test. The version presented to students alternates each January 1st.

Once a teacher-scored test grade is entered in the Grade Book, the assessment is locked. Teachers may allow a student to review a completed assessment and then store the assessment in a locked cabinet to reduce opportunities for the sharing of test questions.

Prevent Unauthorized Access to Staff Accounts

Methods for preventing unauthorized access to staff accounts include:

- Distribute sign in information discreetly — perhaps in sealed envelopes.
- Sign out of Apex Learning every time you are away from your computer.
- Change your password quarterly via My Profile.

Student Motivation

Several strategies encourage and motivate students. Fostering positive teacher-student relationships leads to greater student achievement and a more satisfying learning experience. Deliberately create opportunities for students to interact with each other and with the teacher.

---

[6] http://cdn.apexlearning.com/documents/Best-Practices_Academic_Integrity.pdf

Communication and relationship building can occur face-to-face, via email, phone, Skype, or in the message center.

Additionally, consider using the following motivational strategies:

- Conduct weekly student progress check meetings.
- Give frequent positive feedback.
- Use announcements to publicly praise students who complete courses.
- Strategize with struggling students about how to successfully meet course objectives.
- Contact parents of students who are not meeting scheduled due dates.
- Place students in danger of not completing their course on a learning contract. Consider mandatory attendance until the Grade to Date reaches a satisfactory level.

Best Practices

- ✓ Conduct a student orientation during the first days of class.
- ✓ Position student monitors where teachers can see them.
- ✓ Require students to sign contracts defining consequences for confirmed academic dishonesty.
- ✓ Develop positive relationships with students.

Technical Considerations

Primary Considerations

- Will existing technological resources support the implementation?
- Will the school provide computers and/or internet access to students?
- How much of the Internet should students have access to?
- Should the SIS be programmed to integrate with Apex Learning?

Technology Needs Assessment

Apex Learning recommends conducting a technology assessment to inform resource planning and allocation and answer questions such as:

- Does an organization's Internet connection(s) have enough bandwidth?
- Is the organization's network configured to support Apex Learning solutions?
- Is the available number of computers with Internet access sufficient?
- Are the organization's individual computers configured to display Apex Learning content?

Student Technology Checkout

Determine if students without computers and/or internet access can checkout school equipment.

Virtual Instructional Tools

Students working at a distance benefit from collaboration tools for demos, tutoring, and instruction. Conferencing tools allow teachers to share the teacher computer screen, chat, and share files.

Network and Computer Configuration

Client networks and computers must be properly configured to work with Apex Learning solutions.

Resource: System Recommendations[7]

Automatically Stored Passwords

Automatic storage of passwords poses a security risk on any computer that is accessible to multiple people because it could allow a user to sign in as someone else.

Apex Learning recommends that this feature be disabled as part of the computer configuration process.

---

[7] http://cdn.apexlearning.com/documents/systemrecommendations.pdf

Single Sign-On (SSO)

Staff and students access Apex Learning via their school portal without the need for a second set of credentials. SSO options include LTI, Clever Instant Login, ADFS with SAML 2.0, and Google Apps.

Application Programming Interface (API)

Automate registration and enrollment activities through the Apex Learning API. Create, manage, and archive users, classrooms, and enrollments. Automate Progress and Performance Data Return with Secure Data Exchange. Easily sync Apex Learning student information with school data systems. Transfer real-time student progress, performance, and enrollment data from Apex Learning to your systems through the Apex Learning API.

Contact your Operations Manager for more information about integration options.

Undesirable Web Content

The Internet is a powerful academic resource; however, there is web content that:

- Poses a technical risk when accessed (malicious sites, viruses)
- Is inappropriate in academic settings (gaming sites, adult sites)
- Threatens academic integrity (answer sites, search engines)

Searchable message boards pose a threat to academic integrity, especially if students have unsupervised access to the Internet during assessments. It is violation of the Apex Learning Terms of Use to post course content on the Internet. Report any illegally posted content to Apex Learning Support.

Firewalls and Content Filters

Leverage network firewalls and content filters to restrict access to undesirable content. Combined with proctoring, content filtering can significantly reduce dishonesty. Two methods are:

- Allow access to specific sites and restrict access to all other content (white listing)
- Block access to specific sites and allow access to all other content

A "white list" of all URLs is available to establish a comprehensive directory for any web filtering solution.

Best Practices

- ✓ Conduct a Technology Needs Assessment.
- ✓ Determine if computers and/or internet will be provided to students.
- ✓ Configure workstations and disable pop-up blockers and automatic storage of passwords.
- ✓ Contact Apex Learning Support for a list of the web sites to add to your white/blacklist.

Services and Support

Primary Considerations

- How do I ensure the program is designed for maximum results?
- What professional development is recommended? When should sessions be scheduled?
- What other types of Services and Support are available?

Implementation Success Package

Consider purchasing an Implementation Success Package customized to your program needs.

Planning and Consulting

- Implementation strategy workshop resulting in an implementation plan. The plan outlines programs and instructional models in alignment with best practices. This document establishes a baseline for communicating the vision for each program and district policies and procedures prior to implementation.

- Systems integration support (SSO, LTI, OAuth 2.0, API, SFTP) for user authentication, registration and enrollment, and data exchange.

- Consult with leadership on an ongoing basis as needs arise.

Progress Monitoring

- Monitor and report programmatic progress on an ongoing basis with district leadership.
- Conduct a program review and optimization session to measure progress against goals and provide recommendations to maximize results.

Professional Development and Support

- Custom functionality and best practices for teaching with a digital curriculum for each program.
- Proactive outreach and coaching for school leaders and teachers that appear to need assistance.
- Unlimited staff access to Educator Academy, on-demand functionality training, and resources.
- Visit Apex Learning Help for training videos, getting started guides, best practices, and more.
- Unlimited Support, support@apexlearning.com / 1(800) 453-1454 M-F, 5am - 7pm Pacific Time

Table 7: Recommended Getting Started Session Timeline

Session/Activity	Audience	Date
Implementation Strategy	School Leaders	1-week prior to Launch
Functionality and Best Practices	Teachers	Prior to Launch
Educator Academy	Teachers	Ongoing
Coaching and Mentoring	Teachers	30-days after Launch
Program Review & Optimization	School Leaders	90-days after Launch
End of Year Review	School Leaders	June-July

Best Practices

- ✓ Provide opportunities for continued staff development.
- ✓ Consult Online Help and contact Apex Learning Support when necessary.

Appendix: Program Descriptions

The following digital curriculum programs may be delivered in blended and virtual environments.

Advanced Placement

Offer access to College Board approved courses that otherwise might not receive enough interest to merit an allocation. Students may enroll in courses facilitated by qualified teachers through the ALVS.

Alternative Education/Dropout Prevention

Serve over age and under credited students or offer an alternative to expulsion. Courses may be offered for remediation, credit recovery, and original credit. Alternative programs may be held in the day, evening or virtually. Staff classrooms with District qualified teachers, ALVS qualified teachers, or a combination of both District and ALVS teachers.

Credit Recovery

Provide opportunities to achieve and demonstrate course mastery. Various design options allow students to recover failed courses, earn credit, and return to a four-year graduation track. Credit recovery programs may operate prescriptively or use a fixed curriculum.

College and Career Readiness

Personalize ACT, SAT, ACCUPLACER preparation with prescriptive pretests and adaptive remediation. Provide students with the opportunity to acquire real-world job skills with CTE and Technology Courses.

Differentiated Instruction

Meet a wide range of student needs by giving teachers access to a standards-based repository of multimedia tutorials and prescriptive assessments. Teachers use data to identify areas of weakness and provide targeted support, resulting in greater efficacy of original instruction and increased course passage rates.

Homebound / Long-term Suspension Instruction

Deliver course content virtually with the support of a qualified teacher. Students receive work and feedback in a timely manner and have the support of a mentor who visits the home to monitor assessments and provide guidance.

Homeschool Support

Provide instructional services to home school students to recover ADA.

Intervention/ RTI /MTSS

Provide intervention for students lacking the skills needed for grade-level success. Used in conjunction with a universal screener, Apex Learning provides a powerful curriculum and progress monitoring solution. Reporting features support progress monitoring and data-based decision making.

Middle to High School Transition

Provide support in the summer for students entering high school lacking the skills needed for grade-level success. Adaptive remediation targets academic needs, students receive an introduction to the high school environment and behavioral expectations and develop relationships with staff before the school year begins.

Summer School

Offer opportunities to remediate skills, transition to high school, take courses for original credit and credit recovery, and regain tracking for on-time graduation. Students may work outside of school in addition to scheduled class time in order to complete courses in a condensed timeframe.

Test Readiness

Maximize outcomes by personalizing study and remediation efforts prior to high stakes assessment.

Unit Recovery

Offer competency-based remediation for students struggling to master concepts within a unit or quarter of a course using Apex Learning® digital curriculum. Providing students an alternate way to demonstrate proficiency will decrease initial course failure and, thus, the need for credit recovery.

Virtual Learning

Increase access to high-quality courses and support multiple district programs with virtual instruction. Staff virtual classrooms with District qualified teachers, Apex Learning qualified teachers, or a combination of both District and Apex Learning teachers. Virtual programs may offer single and full-time enrollment options.

Getting Support

Access **Help**, sign into Apex Learning and click Help in the main menu. Apex Learning Support

- Monday – Friday. 5:00 AM – 7:00 PM Pacific Time
- 1-800-453-1454 option 2
- support@apexlearning.com