

DIGITAL CURRICULUM CASE STUDY

"We want to prepare our students for life after high school and give them a diploma we are proud of. Apex Learning curriculum is helping us do that."

Rosemary Fish, Principal
COHO (Creating Optimal High School Opportunities)
Anchorage, Alaska

"We knew the quality was there in Apex Learning online courses because of the results. Our AP students taking the Apex Learning courses were getting fantastic scores on the AP exams. You couldn't ask for a better way to justify the quality of the curriculum."

— Jan Thompson,
Educational Technology Specialist

➤ Anchorage, Alaska

Anchorage School District strives to serve the needs of all of their students. Recognizing that some students don't fit the traditional mold and "get lost" in a large school district, Anchorage has taken the approach of creating special schools and programs to increase available options. But for a school district that covers as much territory as Anchorage does, providing the right opportunity for every student is a challenge.

The advent of online learning opened a world of possibilities, and Anchorage jumped at the opportunity to implement new programs. The educational needs of the district are diverse, ranging from expanding access to Advanced Placement (AP)* courses to offering a dropout recovery program, enabling students to earn original credits despite scheduling conflicts or other obstacles, and providing opportunities for at-risk students to recover credits and get back on track to graduation.

"The fact that the Apex Learning curriculum is highly flexible is enabling us to meet the needs of a variety of students... from credit-recovery students in the traditional high school to students taking AP courses at a distance."

— Julie Besch,
Educational Technology Specialist

Because of its variety of programs, Anchorage needs a flexible solution that can be implemented throughout the district in different ways, that creates alternatives for students without sacrificing rigor, and that is suited to the needs of individual students.

Expanding Access to Advanced Placement

The district first addressed the goal of expanding access to AP courses. With 50,000 students, Anchorage is the 88th-largest school district in the country. It is also spread across a large geographical area, and many of its students attend small schools where AP courses are simply not available, whether due to small student populations or a lack of qualified teachers. The district had tried using online AP courses to expand access in the past without success. Curriculum specialists felt that those courses lacked the integrity of traditional classes.

After a thorough evaluation of online course providers, in 2004 Anchorage chose Apex Learning®. The rigor of the digital curriculum and its alignment to the College Board requirements for AP courses were critical to the decision. Teacher quality was also an important factor, since Anchorage would be relying on online teachers provided by Apex Learning to work with their AP students at a distance. When students began receiving their AP exam scores, Anchorage educators were certain they had made the right decision.

➤ Challenge

Increase educational options to address a wide range of student needs

➤ Solution

Implement one digital curriculum for multiple programs across the district

➤ Success by the Numbers

- 2009–2010 School Year
 - 4,480 students
 - 7,694 course enrollments
- 2008–2009 School Year
 - 3,995 students
 - 7,694 course enrollments
- 2007–2008 School Year
 - 3,075 students
 - 5,608 course enrollments

In addition to offering online AP courses for students who otherwise wouldn't have access, Anchorage also implemented AP Exam Review** from Apex Learning across the district to provide all AP students with online study resources to prepare for the College Board AP exams.

One Curriculum for the Virtual High School

When Anchorage first started using Apex Learning digital curriculum, the company's offering was limited to AP courses. As the Apex Learning course catalog grew to include general studies courses, it was only natural that Anchorage would consider these online courses for use in their virtual school.

Anchorage's virtual high school, MyHigh, serves students who need to earn original credits but have scheduling conflicts, students who need to recover credits or improve poor past grades, and expelled students who work from home and meet with a teacher or counselor once a week.

In almost all cases, district teachers provide instruction for online general studies courses. However, Anchorage does utilize Apex Learning online teachers to fill gaps — for example, when there is a small class and the district cannot justify the expense of assigning one of its teachers.

While Anchorage continues to use certified Apex Learning online teachers for most of their AP courses, they are starting to take advantage of district AP teaching resources by aggregating students from up to seven high schools into an online classroom staffed by a teacher from one of the participating high schools.

"When Apex Learning started offering general courses, we jumped. It's great to be able to provide courses required for graduation to our distance learning students."

— Rosemary Fish

From Distance Learning to the Classroom

Initially focused on meeting the needs of its distance learning programs, Anchorage has extended the use of Apex Learning digital curriculum to the brick-and-mortar classroom. It is the sole curriculum used for the district's credit-recovery students in traditional high schools. Students work in computer labs after school to make up credits necessary to graduate.

"We love the fact that Apex Learning courses set the stage for our students. They tell students what they are going to learn, how they are going to learn it, and how long it should take them."

— Rosemary Fish

"Apex Learning digital curriculum allows us to grab a student who is struggling midstream and put them into an online course that keeps them moving toward graduation."

— Julie Besch

Students who are withdrawn from a traditional course (either because they are failing or have attendance issues, consistent with district practice) are immediately placed in an Apex Learning online course, enabling them to continue to earn course credit. Instead of attending the traditional class, these students spend the class period engaged in the online coursework in a computer lab. Previously, these students who fell behind at the beginning of the school year were unable to catch up.

Additionally, within Anchorage School District there are nearly 20 "special schools" that serve specific student populations, such as homeless students, students with behavioral, mental or eating disorders, and incarcerated students. Apex Learning online courses, facilitated by on-site certified teachers, are used in classroom computer labs for original credit and credit recovery. When students are ready to return to their home high school, their Apex Learning coursework moves with them.

*AP is a registered trademark of the College Board.

**AP is a registered trademark of the College Board, which was not involved in the production of AP Exam Review.



About Anchorage School District

- Nearly 50,000 K–12 students
- 8 traditional high schools
- 44 alternative schools and programs
- Spans 1,965 square miles