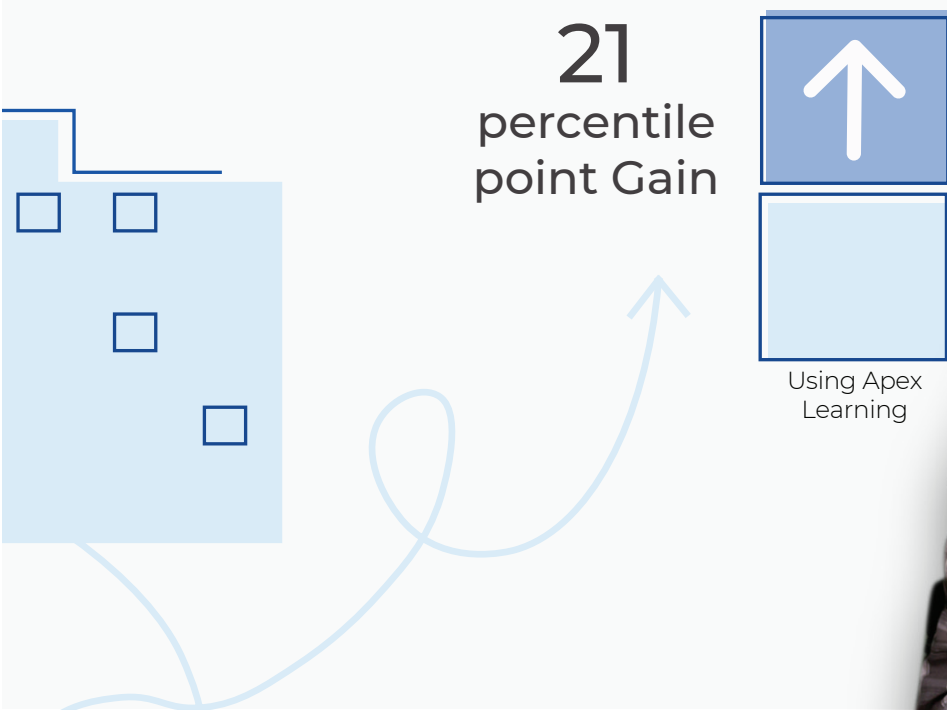




# Proven to Increase Academic Achievement for At-Risk and Drop-Out Recovery Students

Results of a Third Party Study on the Impact of  
Apex Learning Comprehensive Courses in Ohio  
Life Skills Centers

January 2016



## Summary

According to the National Governors Association, “at least one student in five drops out of school, and nearly 5 million 18 to 24 year-olds lack a high school diploma” (Princiotta and Reyna, 2009). Furthermore, a disproportionate number of high school dropouts come from low-income families and are male and members of ethnic minority groups (Reyna, 2011). Apex Learning Comprehensive Courses are developed with an understanding of the range of needs that schools encounter when trying to keep at-risk students on track for graduation and to re-engage students who have left school.

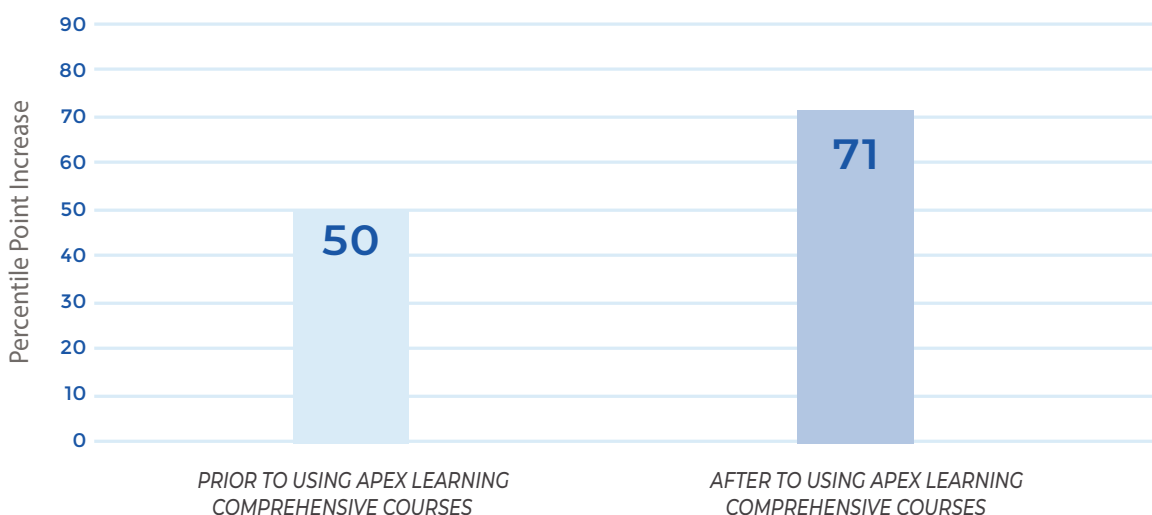
To understand the impact that Apex Learning Comprehensive Courses have on increasing academic achievement for at-risk and dropout recovery students, Apex Learning partnered with a third-party evaluator to study the effect of Comprehensive Courses on the achievement of 1,726 students attending Ohio Life Skills Centers (Empirical, 2012).

*The results of the study show that students achieve greater gains using Apex Learning Comprehensive Courses.*

Graph 1 illustrates that the average (median) student who completed Apex Learning Comprehensive Courses gained 21 percentile points, moving from the 50th percentile to the 71st percentile, on state end-of-course assessments in English language arts, math, and science.

Graph 1

### Achievement Gains for Average Student



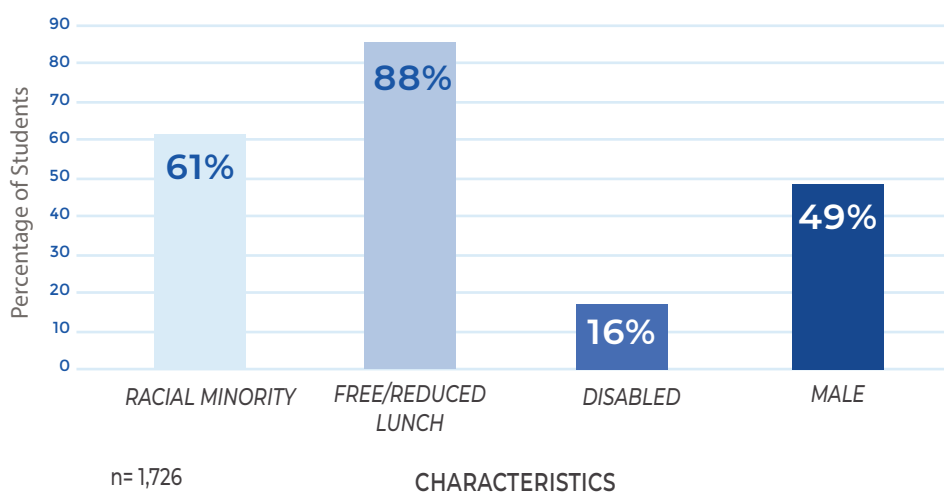
The average (median) student using Apex Learning Comprehensive Courses gained 21 percentile points, moving from the 50th percentile to the 71st percentile, on state end-of-course assessments in English language arts, math, and science.

## The Challenge: Address the Needs of At-Risk and Dropout Populations

Traditional high schools are challenged to serve all students effectively, and this is especially true of students who are at risk of dropping out (Reyna, 2011). Many students at the Ohio Life Skills Centers left high school because they did not feel challenged by traditional academic programs, or believed they just did not fit in, or simply did not have time to attend classes all day. Graph 2 illustrates the diversity of students attending the Ohio Life Skills Centers.

Graph 2

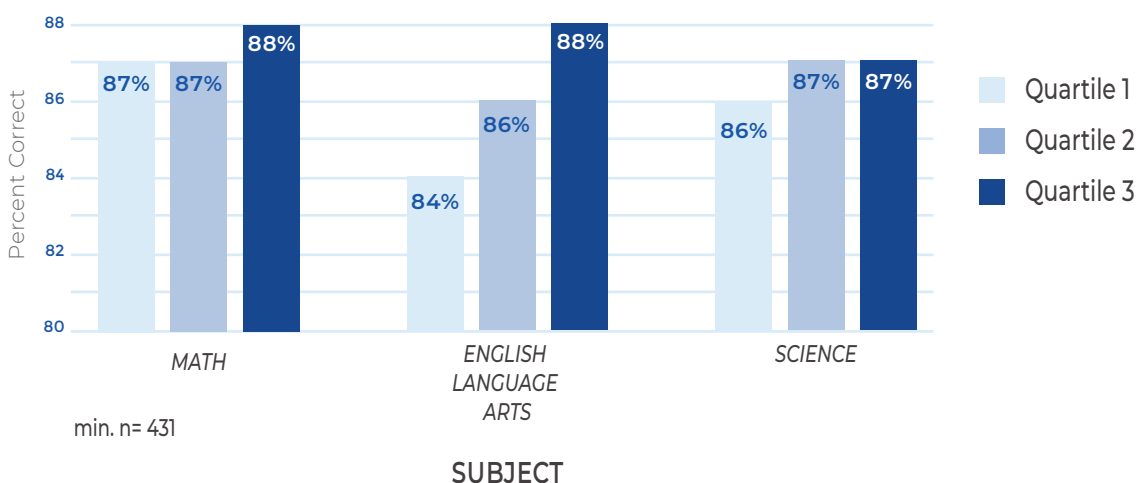
Demographic Characteristics of Dropout Recovery Students Completing Apex Learning Courses



Researchers have reported various reasons for why students drop out of high school, including failing courses or high school exit exams, academic disengagement, behavior that interferes with learning, and challenging life circumstances (Princiotta and Reyna, 2009). Although challenged, these students are still able to achieve academically. As Graph 3 illustrates, students achieved at least 84 percent correct on embedded assessments while completing their math, English language arts, and science courses.

Graph 3

Average Apex Learning Embedded Assessment Score by Subject and Pretest



## The Solution: Meet the Challenges of All Learners

To address the diverse needs of students and to reduce the number of students who drop out of high school, policy experts at the National Governors Association have recommended the creation of rigorous and relevant pathways for all students (Reyna, 2011). An effective curriculum should address individual learning styles and provide clear connections to postsecondary and workforce interests to keep students engaged in school while focusing on their future goals (Princiotta and Reyna, 2009).

Designed to meet the high learning expectations established by the Common Core and individual state standards, Apex Learning Comprehensive Courses enable schools to meet these challenges by making rigorous content accessible and engaging through the use of active learning strategies and opt-in scaffolding.

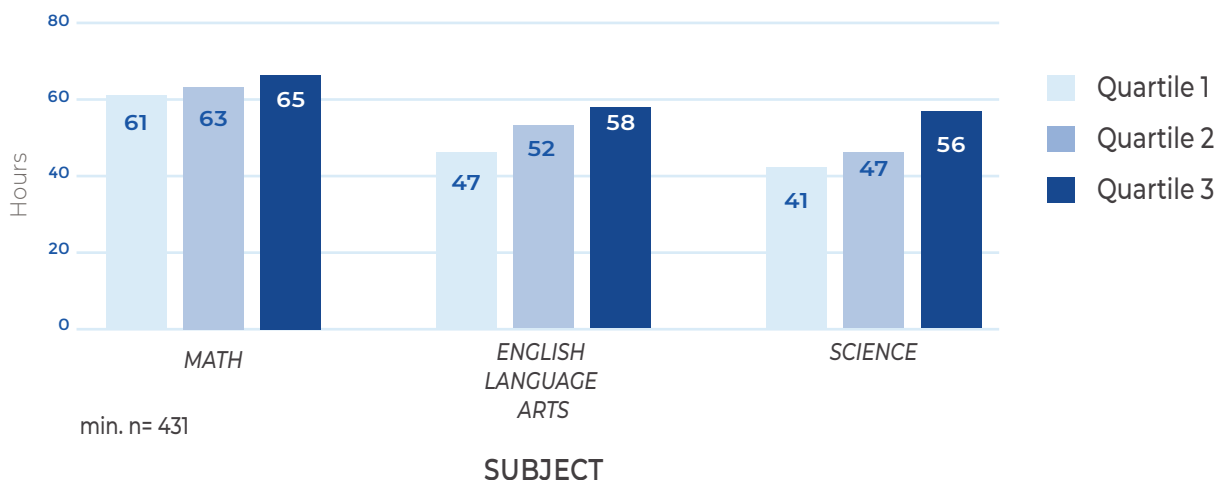
### Active Learning: Engage Students with Learning

The Apex Learning standards-based curriculum was selected by the Ohio Life Skills Centers because it is designed to engage students in active learning that deepens their understanding of the content through critical thinking. Apex Learning Comprehensive Courses engage students in active learning experiences that require them to observe, inquire, create, connect, and confirm. In active learning, students are doing; they participate in meaningful ways in their learning experiences, which results in higher levels of academic achievement.

Students are engaged from the moment they enter an Apex Learning Course. As they progress through a lesson, they achieve a deeper understanding of the content by making decisions, participating in interactive exercises, and completing challenging but achievable tasks. The more time they spend engaged in learning, the better they understand the material and are able to think critically about the content. Graph 4 illustrates the average number of hours that students spend engaged in Apex Learning Comprehensive Courses.

Graph 4

Average Hours Spent using Apex Learning Comprehensive Courses



## Opt-in Scaffolding: Support Student Comprehension

Apex Learning recognizes that students come to high school with varying levels of reading proficiency and preparation for grade-level academic content. Therefore, Apex Learning Comprehensive Courses incorporate a variety of supports and scaffolds to make rigorous content accessible to all students and provide important assistance to students who might otherwise be held back in their learning. Examples of supports and scaffolds that students receive include:

- Relevant points of access and real-world examples
- Guiding questions to breaking down complex material
- Academic vocabulary support unique to each content area
- Literacy supports for struggling readers

Apex Learning Comprehensive Courses also use technology in purposeful ways to enhance reading comprehension. Images, audio, video, animation, and interactive elements that are integrated throughout each lesson provide multiple representations of the course content and address different learning styles.

## The Result: Academic Success with Apex Learning Comprehensive Courses

*Apex Learning partnered with a third-party evaluator to examine the impact of Apex Learning Comprehensive Courses on the academic achievement of at-risk and dropout recovery students at the Ohio Life Skills Centers.*

**Results show that Apex Learning Comprehensive Courses are effective in increasing the learning gains of at-risk and dropout recovery students on state end-of-course subject assessments.**

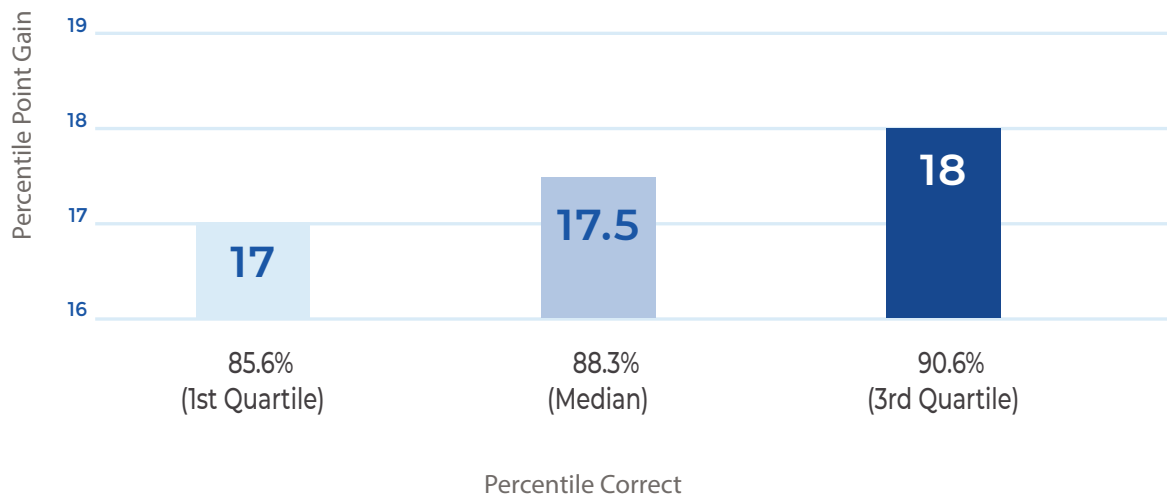
Researchers examined the relationship between using Apex Learning Comprehensive Courses and student performance on state end-of-course math, science, and English language arts assessments. The first analysis compared levels of end-of-course achievement with the amount of time that students had spent completing the courses. The second analysis compared students' end-of-course achievement with their percent correct scores on the assessments embedded in Apex Learning Comprehensive Courses.

The average (median) student using Apex Learning Comprehensive Courses gained 21 percentile points on end-of-course assessments in English language arts, math, and science. Both the amount of time students spent engaged in learning and the percent correct scores on Apex Learning embedded assessments contributed to percentile point gains in end-of-course assessments. How well a student performs in Apex Learning Comprehensive Courses positively affects end-of-course exam scores.

Graph 5 shows that higher percent correct scores on Apex Learning embedded assessments are associated with higher percentile point gains on end-of-course assessments. For each 4.9 percent correct on embedded assessments, students achieved a one percentile point gain on end-of-course assessments. Students in the first quartile, the lowest-performing students, scored an average of 85.6 percent correct on the embedded assessments, which correlates with a 17 percentile point gain on their end-of-course exams. The average score on embedded assessments for students in the third quartile, the highest-performing students, was 90.6 and correlates with an 18 percentile point gain on end-of-course assessments.

Graph 5

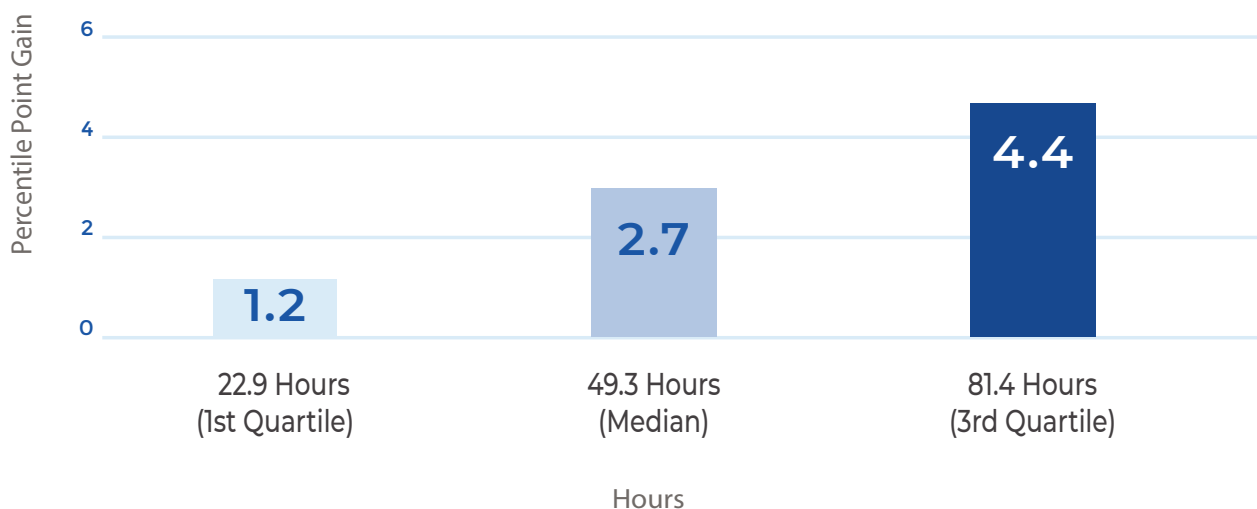
### Achievement Gains for Average Student



Graph 6 shows how increased time spent completing Apex Learning Comprehensive Courses also contributes to higher percentile point gains on end-of-course assessments. The average time usage for students in the first quartile was 22.9 hours and accounted for a 1.2 percentile point gain on end-of-course assessments. In contrast, students in the third quartile spent an average of 81.4 hours and achieved a 4.4 percentile point gain on end-of-course assessments.

**Graph 6**

### Average Percentile Gain for Apex Learning Use by Quartile



## References

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An industry leader with deep expertise in digital curriculum, Apex Learning works closely with school districts across the country to implement proven solutions that increase on-time graduation rates and create opportunities for student success in school and beyond. The company is driven by the understanding that supporting the needs of all students – from struggling to accelerated – strengthens schools and creates stronger communities, brighter futures and a more equitable world. Apex Learning is accredited by AdvancEd and its courses are approved for National Collegiate Athletic Association eligibility. Apex Learning, where opportunity thrives. For more information, visit <http://www.apexlearning.com>.

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