

Apex Online Courses Align with Common Core

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Apex Learning (Seattle) is launching new online courses designed around the Common Core State Standards in math and English language arts. During the 2012-2013 school year, Apex will deliver English I, the first course based on the Common Core, followed by English II, III and IV, geometry and a fourth-year math course.

Forty-five states and the District of Columbia have announced their adoption of the Common Core State Standards, which affect 90% of U.S. students.

Apex CEO Cheryl Vedoe told *EER* that based on the company's evaluation of the Common Core standards and the learning expectations they establish, it was not sufficient to align existing content to the standards, new courses had to be developed.

Apex always starts its course development with standards, develops scope and sequence and then content and assessment, Vedoe said, explaining that an Apex offering is a complete course of instruction that intersperses media with text and assessment to engage students. The courses are delivered via a proprietary learning management system and accessed over the Internet.

The company began the process for development of the Common Core courses in the same way the company traditionally develops courses, but realized the courses themselves would be different. The Common Core is setting goals on where a student needs to be to be college and career-ready and the level of academic achievement required is higher, Vedoe said.

While Apex's existing ELA courses have a traditional literature-based approach, Vedoe said the Common Core calls for students reading various forms of text, including more non-fiction.

"Reading in the current courses is 70% literature, the Common Core calls for 30% literature; that's a complete shift," Vedoe said. Traditionally, students have read text and answered questions about what they have read; the Common Core calls for students to read increasingly complex text and make broader inferences from it.

Apex Grows As Online Learning Expands

More than half of U.S. public school district (55%) report they had students enrolled in distance education courses during the 2009-2010 school year, according to a November 2011 report from the National Center for Education Statistics.

Apex served approximately 345,000 students during the 2010-2011 school year, an increase of more than 20% over the previous year, with about 1.3 million enrollments.

Apex began its online course offerings by delivering Advanced Placement courses to students, who generally accessed them from a distance. That has evolved to where the majority of current enrollees are struggling or

at-risk students accessing courses in a traditional brick-and-mortar setting. To support those struggling students, Apex courses include elements that target reading comprehension and baseline skills.

Apex will offer new courses in addition to the Common Core courses in its catalog of nearly 200 courses for the 2012-2013 school year. The company will add Spanish III and physics to meet the requirements of certain states for high school graduation as well as college entrance criteria.

Apex also is expanding its courses developed specifically for the needs of states. Upcoming courses will align to Texas standards as schools in that state—which is not a Common Core state—prepare for new STARR tests that assess higher order thinking skills and the application of knowledge. Liberal arts math, a course designed specifically for a Florida requirement that can also be taken as an elective, also will be added. ■

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