Case Study
Richmond County School System

RICHMOND COUNTY, GEORGIA

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Can a blended learning summer school program help at-risk high school students build cognitive skills and recover credits?

Problem: A group of students who had given up on school were consistently failing courses.

Solution: Richmond County School System implemented a blended learning summer school program designed to improve access, participation, and academic progress for these high school students.

Outcome: Blended, personalized instruction deepened relationships with teachers and empowered disenfranchised students to master content material and get back on track after falling behind academically.

School Demographics
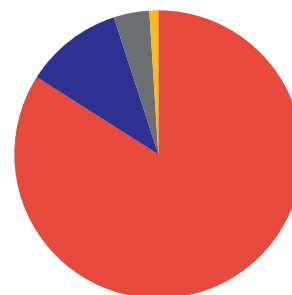
■ African American		84%
■ Caucasian		11%
■ Hispanic		4%
■ Other		1%

Low Income	75%
Students with Disabilities	3%

Background

Situated along the banks of the Savannah River, Richmond County School System (RCSS) is a large, high-poverty school district serving 32,159 students in 57 schools. The majority of students in the district are African American (73 percent); 22 percent are Caucasian, and the remaining 5 percent are Asian, Hispanic, or represent other nationalities. Approximately three-quarters of students qualify for free or reduced-price lunch.

Engaging Disenfranchised Students

In 2013, RCSS implemented a six-week blended learning summer school program to give teenage parents, students in foster care, students with mental health concerns, and at-risk high school students who previously failed courses a second chance to learn subject matter and recover academic credits. Edgenuity's online courses were an integral part of the program.

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>
> Dr. Rosemary Vaughan, District Race to the Top Program Manager

Edgenuity Research

With the encouragement of five subject-area learning facilitators, the 126 students enrolled in the program completed 86 percent of their Edgenuity courses with passing grades. "For many of these students, experiencing success allowed them to realize that it was possible to take ownership of their learning and get back on track to graduate," says Dr. Rosemary Vaughan, the District Race to the Top Program Manager.

What contributed to the program's success? Structured, predictable instruction. Vaughan explains, "Edgenuity's online courses provided a highly predictable instructional routine that focused student attention on content, not form. This consistent format not only allowed students to build familiarity with critical skills and concepts, but it also fostered resiliency and confidence."

The RCSS blended learning summer school program provided both face-to-face and online instruction. Five days a week, teachers mentored and coached students in two 130-minute classes. After school, students spent two hours a day working on Edgenuity online courses at home.

A Rigorous, Multimodal Curriculum that Fosters Cognitive and Metacognitive Skills

Edgenuity online courses worked well for RCSS students because they made instruction more flexible and reduced barriers to learning. "The majority of our summer school students have struggled to process classroom content. They have lost hope for learning and have become paralyzed academically," Vaughan says.

"Edgenuity courses have helped us to reverse this trend by presenting information and concepts in a variety of modalities," she adds. Courses capitalized on a variety of instructional formats, including video lectures, graphic displays, simulations, multimedia activities, closed captioning, and text, to support students in comprehending information. Courses also allowed students to express themselves in different ways, using interactive discussion forums, multimedia composition software, virtual manipulatives, and graphing calculators. Additional tools, such as Edgenuity's assignment calendar, progress bar, online notebook, and the ability to pause, rewind, and replay, taught students critical learning skills such as note taking and study skills. "These features allowed all learners, regardless of learning style, to understand classroom material," Vaughan explains.

Building Powerful Relationships Between Teachers and Students

The presence of technology alone did not foster student success. Engaged teachers who managed, facilitated, and coordinated learning helped ensure that all students learned. Teachers set clear expectations, established personalized learning goals, addressed student misconceptions, and encouraged students to take ownership of their learning.

To guide the process, teachers used data from Edgenuity's learning management system to assess, analyze, and synthesize student work and provide practice, challenge, and remediation when needed. Natalie Robinson, the Academic Supervisor of the Learning Center, notes that data from the Edgenuity educator dashboard helped teachers build powerful relationships with students. Robinson explains, "The data helped strengthen one-on-one relationships by allowing teachers to zero in on the areas in which students needed them the most." The data enabled teachers to celebrate success and hold students accountable for performance.

Robinson found that sharing data from the Edgenuity student dashboard also helped accelerate student achievement. She notes, "The automatic feedback provided students with immediate gratification." When students saw their progress, they were intrinsically motivated and excelled.

Vaughan agrees. "We found that combining strong, skilled teachers with educational technology set high expectations and motivated students to learn."