

DIGITAL CURRICULUM SUCCESS STORY

“The one-size-fits-all delivery of education does not work for every student. We needed a product that we could use in a variety of environments, and Apex Learning is giving us that.”

*Carol Downing
Credit Retrieval Specialist
Volusia County Schools*

› Volusia County, Florida

As the thirteenth-largest district in Florida, Volusia County Schools serves 62,886 students, many of them struggling to graduate. With a student population facing everything from geographical isolation and juvenile justice issues to poverty and teen pregnancy, the district began using technology in programs for at-risk students in 1992. Volusia educators have become experts at effectively using technology to create options for all students, addressing needs related to credit recovery, transitional schools, and dropout prevention and recovery programs.

But in 2005, the district found itself struggling with aging, server-based solutions that were cumbersome, inflexible, and difficult to update. In order to serve its variety of programs for at-risk students, Volusia needed flexibility above all else.

On top of that, the accountability requirements of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) were putting increased pressure on the district to ensure all its programs met high academic standards. Volusia needed a more rigorous curriculum for its at-risk-student programs.

Evaluation and Trial Lead to a District-Wide Implementation

Searching for a solution, Volusia began evaluating digital curriculum providers. The district created a 51-point evaluation rubric and looked at each provider’s offerings from every angle, including instructional design, course content, engagement, interactivity, assessment, additional resources, service and support, and technology requirements.

After narrowing the selection down to three contenders, the district’s next step was to carry out a pilot implementation of each. This gave district administrators and teachers an opportunity to gain hands-on experience with each of the programs — and to see them in action with students — before making a decision.

One contender stood out from the pack: Apex Learning®. Following a successful pilot program, the Apex Learning digital curriculum was fully implemented throughout the district, starting with the 2006–2007 school year.

“Technology evolves. We needed the flexibility of online delivery. We also needed to be able to meet higher academic standards.”

— Carol Downing

› Challenge

Find a flexible, Internet-based instructional solution — that meets high academic standards — for use in programs for at-risk students

› Solution

Implement Apex Learning digital curriculum for credit recovery district-wide and for original credit in alternative education programs

› Success by the Numbers

2007–2008 School Year

- 2,568 students
- 2,602 courses completed for credit

Students Successfully Recovering Credits Toward Graduation

Today, at each of Volusia's traditional high schools, students use Apex Learning online courses in learning labs to recover credits required to get back on track for graduation. Visit a high school learning lab during any class period and you'll observe as many as 30 students working through rigorous courses, each at their own pace. One student might be in the middle of Biology, while the student next to him is completing Algebra I, and yet another student is just starting U.S. Government and Politics. Credentialed teachers staff the learning labs and ensure students are making progress.

"We have so many students for whom our credit-recovery solutions become a lifeline. They don't fit the standard student 'mold,' and Apex Learning solutions provide them with a different way to achieve success."

— Mary Tamarantz
User Support Analyst

"Apex Learning is our partner, and we address issues together. The company's customer service has been and continues to be impeccable."

— Carol Downing

"There was incredible flexibility on the part of the people who work for Apex Learning. They really listened in order to understand our needs, and we ended up with a solution that we wouldn't have gotten from another vendor."

— Carol Downing

Individualized Learning for Original Credit

At the district's alternative education sites — including transitional schools for 8th, 9th, and 10th graders, storefront dropout prevention and recovery schools, and Department of Juvenile Justice sites — students take Apex Learning online courses to earn original credit. An individual learning plan is created for every student who enters one of these programs. Teachers work one-on-one with students to help them stay on track as they work through their courses.

Regardless of the situation, with Apex Learning digital curriculum Volusia County Schools found the flexibility it was looking for. Students work at their own pace, experience success, and build the confidence they need to complete challenging courses. Teachers are able to individualize instruction to meet the unique needs of each student.

"One thing that has changed my life was when I came to this school. Before I came here, I took all my classes as a joke and couldn't wait to leave. But here I work hard every day. Working independently has helped push me to do my best and has helped my confidence level, because it has made me realize I am smarter than I thought."

— Student, Storefront School



About Volusia County Schools

- 62,886 K–12 students
- 9 traditional high schools
- 4 schools of choice
- 8 schools of placement
- Volusia County Schools serves 16 municipalities in the heart of Florida's eastern coast