



Dr. Craig Witherspoon, Superintendent of ECPS

Edgecombe County Public Schools brings 21st century skills to a new generation of savvy students

Industry

Education

Business Issue

Implement a comprehensive online curriculum across multiple high schools to dovetail with the provisioning of thousands of student laptops across the district through the North Carolina 1:1 Learning Technology Initiative.

Solution

SAS® Curriculum Pathways®, an online resource for students and teachers that provides standards-based content in all core disciplines.

Benefits

Edgecombe County Public Schools has adopted SAS Curriculum Pathways across four high schools in multiple core subjects. Teachers have been well-trained and report that students are more engaged and learning at a higher level, as measured by statewide standardized testing.

“I have found that SAS Curriculum Pathways makes the kids think and increases their engagement in the lessons. It is one of the most effective tools I have to engage all my students.”

Joy Robinson
Math Department Chair

Funded by multiple grants and driven by a mission to transform how it delivers high-school classroom education, Edgecombe County Public Schools has brought together powerful student laptops, sophisticated online lessons, and comprehensive professional development and training. By implementing the North Carolina 1:1 Learning Technology Initiative and using SAS® Curriculum Pathways® online curriculum resources, this rural school district is using technology to reinvigorate its curriculum, meeting the needs of the latest sophisticated generation of students.

Serving 56,000 residents in a forward-thinking eastern North Carolina community, the Edgecombe County Public School System (ECPS) is a rural school district with approximately 7,300 students. They are committed to preparing young people for the future with challenging college prep and career-centric academies. The district has a 65 percent free/reduced-lunch population, indicating the economic challenges faced by many citizens. But that hasn't stopped the district from aggressively pursuing strategies to integrate cutting-edge technology into high school classrooms.

The linchpin of these efforts has been Edgecombe's successful tapping of multiple funding sources to pay for provisioning Dell laptops to each of more than 2,000 high school students. “Our school district is philosophically committed to embracing technology in the classroom,” said Dr. Craig Witherspoon, Superintendent of ECPS. “Let's face it, today's students are

‘digital natives.’ They're using sophisticated technology every day – from video game systems to iPods to cell phones. They're accustomed to rich technology and we believe that leveraging the best parts of information technology can dramatically enhance the learning process and associated outcomes.

“We saw three basic elements to achieving this larger goal. First, we needed to get the hardware. Ironically, that turns out to be the easier part of the challenge.” Using grant monies, those computers were procured through the North Carolina 1:1 Learning Technology Initiative. This public-private partnership aims to bolster economic growth across the state, primarily focusing on rural communities. The partnership includes organizations such as the Golden Leaf Foundation and SAS, both supplying computers to students and teachers respectively.

“We then needed to ensure we had the infrastructure to maintain and sustain that equipment – from technicians to networking components. And, perhaps most importantly, we needed to invest in both the online curriculum and the professional development to ensure our faculty is comfortable with the new paradigm and deriving the most from the technology in their classrooms.”

SAS® Curriculum Pathways® aligns with NC 1:1 Learning Technology Initiative

With thousands of computers now in the hands of students, ECPS needed to rethink how it delivered lessons. One of the key components of its teaching strategies is SAS Curriculum Pathways, an online curriculum resource for

students and teachers that provides standards-based content in all core disciplines – English, social studies, science, math and Spanish. These resources provide a range of interactive materials that target higher-order thinking skills and a variety of learning styles – all mapped to state standards using research-validated instructional techniques and acknowledged best practices.

“SAS Curriculum Pathways is an excellent product because it provides an authenticity in its lessons,” said Barbara Hardison, Federal Programs Director and 1:1 Laptop Manager. “The kids don’t feel like they’re doing something artificial – everything is realistic. It has been a critical factor in making our laptop deployment a success.”

Rather than passively waiting for the initiative to build its own momentum, ECPS invested extensively in training its professional staff before deployment of the computers. “We contacted SAS when we knew that the laptops were coming,” Hardison said. “We brought our teachers in for three full days of training. Yes, there’s a cost to that, but with so much at stake, it’s essential to do the rollout properly. When we were done, the teachers were very enthused. We were ready to give the laptops to the kids and the teachers were prepared. Without that training, I’m not sure if we’d have the levels of success we’ve achieved.”

Much of that training was delivered by experts from Dell and SAS. According to Adam Garry, Manager of Global Professional Learning for Dell, the investment in training is critical to the successful rollout of classroom technology.

“When the school system invests in professional development and establishing processes to use these technologies – that’s where the faculty buy-in happens.

You want to show them, ‘This is what should happen in the classroom – and, by the way, here’s a tool to help you do that.’

“The power of SAS Curriculum Pathways is that it brings the ‘a-ha’ moments to the teacher. It’s a curriculum that already has powerful writing resources or starting points for critical thinking and analyzing. You don’t have to spend all the time putting this together. There’s this a-ha moment of ‘Wow, I really can cover my content? And I can also use the technology to engage the kids in different ways than standing up there and lecturing the whole time?’ When the teacher understands that they can ask the right question and facilitate a conversation using the technology, they see the vision for learning that everyone is talking about. They start to get excited about those types of environments.”

ECPS also designated key members of the faculty – four at each school – to act as facilitators for the entire project. With the ability to informally consult their peers, teachers were able to resolve many common issues without delays or elaborate support teams. Usage of SAS Curriculum Pathways within the district has spiked since laptop rollout. There has been a 393 percent increase in logins and 1,035 percent increase in resources usage.

Increasing performance, greater satisfaction

“We’ve really enjoyed some very positive feedback – from both teachers and students,” said Witherspoon. “The students are definitely carrying their laptops in their bags and have truly embraced the program. They’re collaborating, participating and really enjoying school. The whole program has been well received in the classroom, in the school district, and in the community.”

According to Joy Robinson, Math Department Chair with ECPS, SAS Curriculum Pathways has had a very positive impact on her teaching – and student learning. “SAS is terrific in the way it presents lessons,” she said. “You research and respond. You look at examples online and take notes and respond in your own words. I love how they can practice and then take a quiz, which they can e-mail me. There’s instant feedback for them and for me so we can pinpoint and address the gaps.

“Without SAS Curriculum Pathways, it would have been very difficult to adjust to the 1:1 Laptop Initiative. I would have had to design my own curriculum from scratch – and that would have been 20 times more time-consuming. The teachers love just how organized it is and the many different formats to cover a certain topic. You have the interactive tools, inquiry tools, some drill and practice, and you have some projects. It’s such a wonderful application. If I could say one thing about how it makes a difference, it’s the inclusion and engagement of my students – and that’s something teachers struggle with every day. I have found that SAS Curriculum Pathways makes the kids think and increases their engagement in the lessons. It is one of the most effective tools I have to engage all my students.”

From a student performance perspective, Witherspoon believes that using the laptops with the SAS online curriculum resources has driven up scores on statewide standardized tests. “We saw an increase in our end-of-grade and end-of-course composite scores at three of our four high schools,” he said. “And we’re seeing fewer behavioral referrals and suspensions as well. We’re continuing to collect data in these areas and I’m confident that it will document improvements districtwide.”



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