

Special Education Students Achieve Higher Graduation Rates With the Right Support

Hendry County Schools, Florida

District Profile 2019-2020

- ✔ Total Enrollment: 8,914
- ✔ Graduation Rate: 90.4%
- ✔ Small, Rural District

Clewiston High School Profile 2019-2020

- ✔ Enrollment: 933
- ✔ Graduation Rate: 91%

School Demographics

- ✔ Hispanic: 58.7%
- ✔ Black: 23.9%
- ✔ White: 15%
- ✔ Asian: 1.1%
- ✔ American Indian/Alaska Native: <1%
- ✔ Two or More Races: <1%

Student Groups

- ✔ Students with Disabilities: 14.1%
- ✔ English Learners: 4.9%
- ✔ Economically Disadvantaged: 99.5%

Solution

- ✔ Courses
- ✔ Virtual Learning

Challenge

Special education students at Clewiston High School struggled with the online curriculum they were using for credit recovery, to the point where they either dropped out of school or just couldn't graduate. They had significantly lower graduation rates than their general education peers, a situation that one ESE (Exceptional Student Education) teacher dedicated himself to rectifying. The challenge was to help them recover their credits and increase their GPAs, while also adhering to their IEPs. But they needed an online curriculum with the right supports to make progress.

Solution

That ESE teacher, Reko Parantha, is now the Assistant Principal at Clewiston High School. His quest for a better solution to give special education students the same opportunity to succeed as general education students started with a small-scale implementation of Apex Learning in 2011. He made sure the district's administration was aware of the positive results. Hendry County Schools expanded Apex to other programs over the years and, in June 2021, it made Apex the district-wide solution to meet the needs of students and teachers.

Results

After the first full year of implementing Apex Learning, Clewiston High School was able to raise the ESE graduation rate from approximately 70% to 91%. Fast forward 10 years, and Apex is the district-wide solution, with the flexibility to offer in-person, blended, and virtual learning.

The Search for a Better Credit Recovery Option

Hendry County Schools is a small, rural district. For students in this community, walking across Cane Field, the school's football stadium, to receive their diplomas is a special milestone.

Prior to switching to Apex for credit recovery 10 years ago, Clewiston High School was using another online curriculum. At that time, Mr. Parantha was an ESE teacher working with seniors on an IEP or 504 curriculum. He was frustrated that his students weren't getting the support they needed in that online curriculum and decided to explore other options. After surveying students, parents, teachers, counselors, and administrators, he noticed the theme that kept coming up was that they didn't really have a credit recovery option with supports built into it for ESE students. Mr. Parantha attended education conferences to try and find solutions and subsequently learned about Apex.

Mr. Parantha recalls that the built-in supports of the Apex curriculum were absent from other online curriculum solutions he had reviewed. Apex filled in critical skill gaps, enabling juniors and seniors to successfully recover credits. "They deserve to have the same option in that credit recovery lab that every other general education student has," said Mr. Parantha.

After the first full year of implementing the program, Clewiston High School was able to raise the ESE graduation rate from approximately 70% to 91%. With support from the district, Mr. Parantha continued to expand the program—he believed that they could increase the graduation rate of ESE students even more.

"I wanted those kids to have the same opportunity to walk across what we call Cane Field [the football stadium], which is a historic graduation ceremony...it's a very special thing for the kids in this community."

Reko Parantha
Assistant Principal

More Options for Students and Teachers

Apex gives Hendry the flexibility to meet the needs of all students and teachers and provide more options for learning. The district has continued to use Apex for in-person instruction for credit recovery. Some teachers use it in a blended learning classroom for whole group instruction. Students who are immunocompromised (or have family members who are) can receive fully virtual instruction through Hendry Online Learning Academy.

Learn more about Apex Learning digital curriculum solutions:

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