

Meeting the Needs of Diverse Independent Study Students in Helendale, California

Independence Charter Academy, Helendale, California



Dr. Michael A. Esposito
Director of Pupil
Services



105 students
Grades K to 12



Assessments
Courseware
Exact Path



59% students are
economically
disadvantaged
21% of students are
special education

The Challenge:

Independence Charter Academy (ICA) of Helendale School District (HSD) in Helendale, California, is an independent study program, serving students from transitional kindergarten (a type of prekindergarten) through grade 12 from across the district, as well as the state. Students complete coursework primarily at home and come to campus twice a week for intervention classes and for one-on-one meetings with their teachers for assessments and discussion of goals, challenges, and progress.

As an independent study program, ICA provides each student with a personalized curriculum tailored to his or her needs, and when Dr. Mike Esposito, HSD director of pupil services, became director of ICA in 2017, the charter school was utilizing paper-and-pencil assignments. Dr. Esposito wanted to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of ICA, and he believed that online learning could help him do that. Having used Courseware, Edmentum's customizable course offerings for grades 6–12, with great success in his previous role, Dr. Esposito made the decision to bring the program to ICA. Then, when his Edmentum consultant showed him Exact Path, Edmentum's K–8 individualized learning solution, while on a break during a professional development session, he brought that program to ICA as well.

Independence Charter Academy (ICA) is an independent study program ready to make the from paper-and-pencil to digital curriculum. It needed an online curriculum provider that allows students to work at their own pace through individualized assignments and one that is aligned to the standards and to the rigorous requirements of the UC and CSU “a-g” program. Through implementing Courseware and Exact Path, ICA has been able to transition seamlessly to digital curriculum and improve both the teacher and student experiences.

How They Did It:

ICA kicked off its online curriculum implementation in the fall of 2017 with all 6th to 12th grade students using Courseware as their primary curriculum. After just a short time, it was clear that utilizing Courseware made independent study more adaptive to the needs of each student and more manageable for teachers. As students work through their coursework at home, built-in questions and mastery tests provide immediate feedback so that students always know how they are performing and where they need additional help. Then, teachers use the student progress and performance data captured in the Courseware platform to intervene with students, discuss pain points, and celebrate successes.

“Teachers are able to go over the mastery tests and unit tests with students after they complete them, and they can discuss what was missed and check for understanding,” Dr. Esposito explained. “That’s probably the biggest asset. A teacher can go in and counsel the kids and work with them to make them better.”

Courseware is also saving the ICA teachers time on creating content and grading. Because the curriculum is robust, rigorous, and standards-aligned and most assignments are system-graded, teachers can spend more time making sure that each student is on the right track.

Courseware helps ICA meet the needs of its students with courses that are approved through the University of California (UC) and the California State University (CSU) “a-g” program. Taking “a-g”-approved courses while in high school helps students qualify for admission to state universities.

“The biggest thing we were looking for is using the curriculum for UC and CSU classes so our independent study kids could go to college,” explained Dr. Esposito. “We applied for the UC/CSU membership because not many independent study schools do that throughout the state, and when we told them we were using Edmentum, they said, ‘Oh, no problem at all.’”

Along with implementing Courseware for grades 6–12, ICA also uses Exact Path as the online curriculum for grades K–5. Rather than working at their own pace through a course, as middle and high school students do in Courseware, with Exact Path, students take an adaptive diagnostic assessment for each subject (reading, language arts, and math) and then are prescribed an individualized learning path of curriculum based on their results. Students work on curriculum that is not limited to their current grade level but, instead, is based on their individual strengths and weaknesses.

"You guys [Edmentum] hit all the standards, you hit the Common Core, [and] you hit all the bells and whistles, so to speak, that many districts and the CDE [California Department of Education] require," Dr. Esposito explained.

Exact Path has proven to be a dynamic tool for the teachers at ICA, allowing them to track each student’s growth and easily identify knowledge gaps through reports and through the Knowledge Map, which shows each student’s learning progression through the program.

"The Knowledge Map [in Exact Path] is cutting edge," said Dr. Esposito. "Our entire learning community was ecstatic to have that data. If the kid's in 6th grade and he's reading at a 4th grade level, we know. It's just been a really powerful resource."

Dr. Esposito was so pleased with Exact Path’s ability to diagnose and address student needs that now, in addition to their Courseware courses, middle and high school students also use Exact Path to fill learning gaps. Also, 9th grade students take the Exact Path math diagnostic as the math placement test that they are required to take in accordance with California law.

To ensure that the Courseware and Exact Path implementations are successful, ICA’s Edmentum consultant, Dawn Wynne, has been there every step of the way.

“She was beyond great,” said Dr. Esposito. “My staff really warmed up to her. As a matter of fact, when we redid our contract, we wanted Dawn to do the training. We actually tried to put it in the contract. She’s so close—all my teachers have her on speed dial in their phones, and she’s always there

to answer a question any time, day or night. Even with email, she gets back to you quite quickly. She's just a great teacher, and my teachers love her."

"You guys hit all the standards, you hit the Common Core, [and] you hit all the bells and whistles, so to speak, that many districts and the CDE require."

Dr. Michael A. Esposito
Director of Pupil Services

Success:

Implementing Courseware and Exact Path online curriculum has been beneficial for ICA students and educators alike. Students receive in-the-moment feedback that can propel learning more quickly, and teachers have easier access to the data they need to guide and support their students in reaching their learning goals. The faculty and staff at ICA are hoping that the growth their students have seen will correlate to increased state test scores, and they are confident that, with continued use of Courseware and Exact Path, it will.

"Now, we have everyone [using Edmentum], and we're going to make strides every year," Dr. Esposito said.

As further testament to ICA's success, the school has received promising feedback from parents. Here are a few of their sentiments:

"I truly believe [Edmentum] played a huge part in my child exceeding in every level of state testing this past school year (her first time doing this). I wish all of our schools would adopt this program."

"ICA is excellent. I am so glad my teenager had the opportunity to transfer ... to it. Her grades are very good, and her ability to finish assignments independently is great training for college next year."

"[ICA is a] great school. My child would not have passed without the extra help he gets from this school."

“The Knowledge Map [in Exact Path] is cutting edge. Our entire learning community was ecstatic to have that data. If the kid's in 6th grade and he's reading at a 4th grade level, we know. It's just been a really powerful source.”

Dr. Michael A. Esposito
Director of Pupil Services

The Future:

Dr. Esposito is very excited about the progress his students have made using Exact Path and Courseware and has already begun widening Exact Path's use to other parts of the district. As the director of pupil services for Helendale School District, he needed a program that could help improve academic growth for special education students, and he believed that Exact Path would be a great solution. Now, all of the special education students in Helendale School District are also using Exact Path.

For more information:

Contact 800.447.5286 or visit www.edmentum.com to learn more about Edmentum's online learning solutions.