



CASE STUDY

# Blended Learning Helps District Increase Graduation Rate

## St. Mary's County Public Schools, Maryland

### Challenge

Increase the graduation rate, improve student achievement, and maximize teacher effectiveness.

### Goal

- Expand the use of technology to increase student learning and help at-risk students graduate from high school.

### Solution

- Use Apex Learning digital curriculum in a blended learning environment to provide struggling students with the opportunity to remediate and recover credits, increase student achievement, and ensure students graduate.

### Results

- Great Mills High School increased its four-year adjusted cohort graduation rate by 6 percentage points in one year, from 76% in 2011 to 82% in 2012. Superintendent Dr. Michael Martirano attributed much of the increase to the use of Apex Learning online courses in a blended learning model.
- One in five students who graduated participated in the remediation and credit recovery program.

### Graduation Rate



### Success By The Numbers

2010 – 2011 school year

- 300 students completed 470 courses.

### About St. Mary's County Public Schools

Located in Leonardtown, the district is approximately 85 miles north of Baltimore.

- 17,450 K-12 students
- 3 high schools, 4 middle schools
- 27 schools, including the county's first public charter school



## Addressing At-Risk Students

Superintendent Dr. Michael Martirano initiated a plan to improve student achievement and increase teacher effectiveness. A focal point was to expand the use of technology to help at-risk students graduate from high school. Using Apex Learning digital curriculum, the district launched a blended learning program for credit recovery at Great Mills High School in partnership with the America's Promise Alliance Grad Nation campaign and Apex Learning.

“Many of these students wouldn't have graduated on time without this program. The district recorded the largest overall graduating class in its history.”

**Dr. Michael Martirano**

SMCPS Superintendent

## Keeping Students on Track

One of the challenges of remediation and credit recovery programs is that each student starts at a different point with a unique set of needs. In this blended learning program, Apex Learning online courses provided direct instruction as well as formative and summative assessment. This model allowed each student to focus on specific content he or she had yet to master and to move at his or her own pace. Some students used the courses for remediation and credit recovery, while others accessed the digital content for unit recovery, which allowed them to remediate single units while staying enrolled in and completing traditional classroom courses.

“Our district did not have the resources to provide the number of courses needed without this program.”

**Dr. Michael Martirano**

## Using Blended Learning to Individualize Instruction

As part of the program, St. Mary's County Public Schools (SMCPS) hired Sarah Poe, a passionate teacher with experience instructing in a digital learning environment. Poe used real-time data to monitor student progress and performance and determine the best way to help each student achieve. Blended learning enabled her to engage each student one-on-one, and determine how each student was doing and why he or she was struggling or excelling. “I can sit next to a student who's working in a lesson and talk with them about what they're learning — provide instruction and guidance — and support them every step of the way,” said Poe.

## Hitting New Highs

The district recorded the largest overall graduating class in its history, which demonstrated that blended learning was an effective instructional model. Based on the success of the program at Great Mills High School, Martirano expanded the program to all middle schools and high schools throughout the district.

## Contact

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“I could take longer on the lessons that were harder for me and move faster through the stuff I already knew. I really think I learned more.”

**Great Mills High School Senior, who participated in the program**