



Increasing Graduation Rates with Credit Recovery in Hazard, Kentucky

Perry County Central High School



Michelle Ritchie,
Principal



900 students
Grades 9 to 12



Courseware



98% Caucasian
75% economically
disadvantaged

The Challenge:

Perry County Central High School (PCC) is a rural, 900-student school in eastern Kentucky. The school's free/reduced lunch rate is currently trending upward due to the closure and consolidation of many of the area's coal mines, the backbone of its economy.

PCC Assistant Principal Lea Sparks, stated, "79 percent of our students are on free and reduced lunch. Coal was our major industry, but sharp declines in jobs in the coal industry, as well as layoffs, have been a hit to our community and students."

At a time when most counties in Kentucky are adding jobs, Perry County's unemployment rate has actually increased in the past two years. All of these factors make PCC's mission to prepare students for college and career more important than ever.

Ten years ago, PCC turned to Plato Courseware to aid in its credit recovery efforts. "We liked Plato's ease of use for our teachers, as well as its accessibility compared to printed materials," explained PCC Principal Michelle Ritchie.

Perry County Central High School (PCC) in rural eastern Kentucky serves an area whose primary economy was built around coal mining. The past decade's economic downturn impaired the area, and students needed educational opportunities to make them more competitive in the wider economy. Thanks to Plato Courseware, PCC's graduation rate is at an all-time high, and the school is outpacing the state's goals in college and career readiness.

How They Did It:

As time has moved on and the needs of students have changed, the flexibility and best-in-class course offerings of Plato Courseware have made the program a powerful tool in PCC's arsenal. Its uses have moved beyond credit recovery to becoming a pivotal tool in preparing students for college and careers after high school graduation, especially considering the school's recent adoption of a bring your own device (BYOD) initiative.

Ritchie explained, "We use Plato during the regular school day in our credit recovery program to help students recover credit, stay on grade level, and graduate on time, as well as in our summer school program for the same reason. Students prepare for the ACT® and the COMPASS® tests with it. We also use the program in our adult education program, the Learning Academy. It's become popular with the teachers for enrichment and RTI [response to intervention] support as well."

Adequate test preparation is extremely important in Kentucky, as it was the first state to adopt the Common Core State Standards. With the goal of college and career readiness, the ACT test and other assessment results now factor into a school's college- and career-readiness score, which is used for accountability purposes.

The Edmentum suite of products is uniquely designed to help the secondary learner prepare for nationwide entrance and placement exams like the ACT test. The instruction can either be self-paced, instructor led, or both, depending on the preference of the school. Courses are precisely aligned with the tests, and then instruction is prescribed based on the student's existing skills.

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Michelle Ritchie,
Principal

Success:

PCC's ability to add alternatives for its students has paid off in increased graduation rates, a college- and career-readiness rate that is outpacing its state targets, and the futures of many students, whose trajectories have been improved through the various programs that utilize Plato Courseware.

From 2013 to 2014, PCC's four-year graduation rate increased from 81.7 to 85.9 percent, beating the target set for the school by the state by more than two points.

College- and career-readiness rates started being issued in 2010, with PCC having only 18 percent of its students qualify. In 2014, that figure stood at 56.8 percent, outpacing the state target by a full six percentage points.

“In the 2013–14 school year, 50 seniors were enrolled in the credit recovery program. Seven of these students withdrew from school. Of the 43 that remained, only one did not graduate; 42 of the 43 students (98 percent) graduated, including six that were fifth-year seniors who may not have graduated without this program,” Ritchie exuded.

This program has saved many students who have lagged behind. Many students would not graduate or graduate on time without this program.

Lea Sparks,
Assistant Principal

The Future:

As Perry County Central High Schools’ BYOD initiative takes shape, and the school’s staff keeps coming up with ways to improve the outcomes of its students, the school will continue to leverage the power of Plato Courseware to make sure its current success becomes lasting achievement.

“This program has saved many students who have lagged behind,” said Sparks. “Many students would not graduate or graduate on time without this program.”

For more information:

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