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Creating Equity Through Technology in Kershaw, South Carolina

Kershaw County School District, South Carolina

Dr. Shane Robbins, Superintendent

10,500 students Grades Pre-K to 12

Courseware Exact Path Reading Eggs Study Island

69% Caucasian 24% African American 4% Hispanic 12% economically disadvantaged

The Challenge:

When Kershaw County School District (KCSD) superintendent Dr. Shane Robbins arrived in South Carolina in 2018, he envisioned the diverse school district as a model for 21st century learning. The district's high schools had been the first in the state to provide 1:1 technology for students in 2004, and it was picked as one of the five original districts in South Carolina to pilot an online learning initiative in 2018. Dr. Robbins understood that there was a long way to go in creating comfort and competency in a 1:1 blended learning environment and in utilizing technology to give students a voice in their instruction.

"I try to give voice to the voiceless, and I try to use the technology to gather back time that's otherwise lost for my teachers," said Dr. Robbins. "I feel like that's one of the most precious commodities and resources that a teacher

can have—is time. And so, technology has a way to do that and to speed up the process and to help provide equity to students in a school district, regardless of their socioeconomic background, whether they're rural, urban, [or] whatever the case may be."

With the goal of delivering individualized, equitable education for all, KCSD began the 2019–20 school year using a range of Edmentum programs—Exact Path, Study Island, Courseware, and Reading Eggs—to create a solid foundation of easy-to-use tools that provide actionable data to drive decision-making. Dr. Robbins knew that the right tools would put valuable time back in his teachers' hands and allow them to focus on their unique student needs.

How They Did It:

The district implemented Exact Path and Study Island for all K–12 learners, which synced with its NWEA MAP Growth assessment, making that data actionable. Study Island was used as a formative assessment tool, focusing on standards mastery, and Exact Path was used to offer diagnostic-driven, individualized learning paths.

Courseware on the middle and high school campuses gave students access to a robust collection of aligned, interactive courses that are flexible, dynamic, and personalized. The district uses these courses to offer career and technical education (CTE) and credit advancement and recovery to provide students with more selection than the district would otherwise be capable of offering. Reading Eggs, Edmentum's dynamic 3-in-1 learn-to-read program, was implemented on elementary and middle school campuses to create more individualized learning opportunities.

Dr. Robbins explained his district's COVID-19 pandemic experience, "When we knew that this pandemic wasn't going to go away, we started planning for what the 2020–21 school year was going to look like and how we would modify the things that we were doing with technology moving forward so that it would be an ample long-term instructional delivery process."

Prepandemic, Kershaw County School District leaders knew that, to reach their goals, they first had to expand device access on elementary and middle school campuses and provide in-depth staff training.

"I knew that [Edmentum] was something that would be very applicable for us, and honestly, the tools are easy to use and learn and understand," reported Dr. Robbins. "And so, we implemented that as soon as I got here. Now, take us through 2018, '19. We start to build an educational technology service department, train our teachers, familiarize them, raise the expectations of what a one-to-one school district looks like, and move forward into the future for us."

One way the district models this commitment to growth is by using a delayed start on Wednesdays to create professional learning communities (PLCs) and to train teachers in best practices using the technology and understanding and acting on the data.

"Whenever I talk about why I think Edmentum is such a great tool, especially for districts that are using NWEA, it's because it individualizes instruction," stated Dr. Robbins."

He also went on to describe how Edmentum programs remove the stigma of remediation because everyone is working within the same platform, unaware of the levels their classmates are working on. No students are pulled from the classroom; it can all be done in one space.

For the 2020–21 school year during the pandemic, Dr. Robbins shared, "[The goal] was simply: 'How do we give our community choice to make sure that their students are progressing amid school closures and a pandemic?'"

The district offered synchronous and asynchronous options and began its now-established Kershaw County School District Virtual Academy.

Dr. Robbins explained, "[The Virtual Academy] is never going to go away. I never want it to go away. It's something that we were going to progress to—it's just the pandemic put us in hyperdrive to get there."

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Dr. Shane Robbins,
Superintendent

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Success:

One example of success can be seen at Camden Elementary School in KCSD Principal Matia Goodwin and Instructional Technology Coach Valerie West set up a powerful Exact Path implementation that accelerated academic growth and provided value for both students and teachers. Following initial setup, they instituted a Trophy challenge to recognize individual students who reached skill mastery in the program. What started as standardized Trophy goals for all has since morphed into personalized learning goals for each individual learner. Exact Path's virtual Trophies are tracked by classroom teachers, listed for display in the cafeteria, and celebrated during morning announcements.

Following a full semester of implementing Exact Path learning paths powered automatically by data from fall and winter NWEA MAP Growth assessments, the hard work paid off. Mrs. Goodwin and Mrs. West reported that 88 percent of students grew in reading and 83 percent of students grew in math. Additionally, 56 percent of students met their MAP Growth

projections in math and 54 percent in reading. Educators at Camden Elementary learned that, out of 307 total students using the program with fidelity, only two students did not make sufficient growth in math and only eight students did not make sufficient growth in reading according to their NWEA MAP winter diagnostic results.

"Those numbers were definitely something to celebrate," remarked Mrs. Goodwin. "It was also eye-opening for those teachers who might not have been using Exact Path as much at the beginning of the school year to say, 'Oh, wait a minute, these students are really growing; maybe I need to start.' It was really kind of fun to see teachers I'd never shouted out on the leaderboard—all of a sudden, I was saying different names. We're very excited to see what happens on our spring assessment data."

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The Future:

Dr. Robbins' vision of equity through technology allows the district educators to move away from traditional classroom instruction. Working together, Kershaw County School District teachers and administrators are committed to an ever-evolving 21st century model driven by technology and community voice. The district wants students to be able to advocate for what they want and need to achieve their goals. Dr. Robbins said, "There is zero doubt in my mind that the efficacy of the utilization of these products will show greater results for us—greater achievement results."

For more infomation:

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