



Getting a Jump-Start on High School Readiness

Fullerton Joint Union High School District, California



Lisa Valdes
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Hispanic or Latino: 54.7%
Asian: 18.6%
White: 18.3%
Filipino: 3.4%
Black: 2.4%
Two or more races: 2%
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander: 0.3%
ELL: 10%
Free and reduced meals: 46.7%



74% of ninth graders completed the health course

The Challenge:

Updated content standards for health education took effect in California in 2016, requiring all districts to provide a health course at least once in middle school and once in high school. Schools are now faced with the challenge of fitting an extra course into students' already packed schedules and ensuring that their health courses are properly aligned to standards.

"This is a life skill we're giving them."

How They Did It:

Fullerton Joint UHSD offers online learning to students through the iSierra Online Academy, so they already had the infrastructure in place to offer the new health course online. Since 2010, the district has partnered with Apex Learning to develop courses that challenge students, enrich learning, and meet standards. The district approached their summer health course as an opportunity to help incoming freshmen transition to high school, and start completing graduation requirements before school even began. They offered the two-week course through their existing online academy and expanded the successful partnership with Apex Learning that began in 2010. The program was implemented to offer the two-week course in seven waves. Students who couldn't complete the course in two weeks could continue where they left off in the next wave, without having to start from the beginning again. Teachers were given virtual and in-person training, and had continuing support from Lisa Valdes, the Online Learning Department Chair of iSierra Online Academy.



The California Healthy Youth Act standards are very specific. We wanted to make sure the course we offered really addressed them so we worked with Apex Learning to build a course directly based on the standards.



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Online Learning Department Chair, iSierra Online Academy

Success:

While the Health course fulfills the new California Healthy Youth Act standards, the course also provides students with a unique online learning experience. "Students are used to being passive and waiting to be told what the answer is," shared Valdes. "The online health program pushes these

soon-to-be high schoolers out of their comfort zones and starts to teach them how to problem solve and take ownership of their learning.” It was a good opportunity for students to practice online learning skills such as taking exams, interacting with teachers and other students, submitting assignments, and other tasks needed to excel in high school, college, and the workplace.

74% of ninth graders completed the health course. Administrators were impressed with the completion rates and how well the program worked; as a result, they have decided to offer the course again during summer 2017.

The Future:

Valdes emphasized that the district was willing to invest the time and resources to make the program a success because it was in the best interests of the students. “Remarkable teachers and administrators were very supportive and willing to try something new.” They saw the program as relevant to what students need to know now and in the future. Teachers were committed and understood that their role was really about motivating kids, assisting them, and guiding them toward becoming independent learners.

Preparing students for online environments they will encounter in high school, college, training courses, or work puts them on the path to success. Says Valdes: “This is a life skill we’re giving them.”

For more information:

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