

# Furnishing a Positive Alternative for Credit Recovery in Warren, Michigan

Van Dyke Public Schools – Warren, Michigan



**Wendy Cusic**  
Director of Curriculum  
and Instruction



**2500 students**  
Grades pre-K to 12



**Courseware**



**60% African American**  
**24% Caucasian**  
**10% multiracial**  
**89% economically disadvantaged**  
**19% special education**

## The Challenge:

Alternative education takes on many different forms. In the broadest sense, such programs are for students who are not achieving the success they desire in traditional classrooms. There can be nuances involved in alternative programs, but smaller districts often lack the resources to explore all the possibilities of education outside of the standard model. Because of that, alternative programs can sometimes carry a negative connotation.

Such was the case for Van Dyke Public Schools (VDPS) in Warren, Michigan, just outside of Detroit. The district's alternative program had become a catch-all for students who were no longer welcome in the classroom and whose progress stagnated in part due to a one-size-fits-all online curriculum.

“There wasn’t a place for kids who weren’t huge behavior problems, who just needed a different option,” said VDPS Director of Curriculum and Instruction Wendy Cusic. “It was also very expensive to run. The online component wasn’t working because we couldn’t customize it for the Michigan curriculum. We would have to pull out the essential standards and figure out what kids needed to move on ourselves. Once we dissolved that program, we realized we need to do something for kids that just needed an alternate path.”

A thorough research project revealed that what the district’s students needed was a customized solution along with dedicated mentoring. The first part of that solution would be provided by Edmentum through its Courseware solution.

“The platform was super easy to use,” said Ms. Cusic. “The dashboard was simple and made it easy to track where kids are and see their pacing.”

**Alternative education and credit recovery should be much more than another place for struggling students. The right program finds a way to reach every child and provides the necessary support for students to reach their goals. Such initiatives used to be out of reach for smaller districts with limited resources, but Van Dyke Public Schools is helping students get back on track at an impressive rate using Edmentum Courseware.**

### **How They Did It:**

From the start, there is one critical difference between VDPS’s alternative program, the Success Academy, and what tends to come to mind: the majority of students want to be there. In fact, there is an interview process in order to maintain a cap of 60 students.

“Courseware is the main means of instruction, with no direct instruction, so the communication piece is really important,” explained Success Academy Director and Teacher Mentor Jennifer Iloff. “So, I meet with students and parents beforehand, familiarize them with the platform, and talk through what a classroom setting at home may look like.”

The Success Academy has moved away from the cohort model of progress, instead placing each individual student on his or her own personalized learning path. This also allows the program to widen the potential base of students. Right now, access to the Success Academy is available for students in grades 7 through 12.

Most Success Academy students work from home, but they are required to visit headquarters at least twice a week and meet with their mentor. The Academy's on-site lab is also available to students every day as needed. At the end of each semester, Ms. Iloff reviews the roster and assigns dedicated mentors to those students who need more support, while others may share a mentor.

The ability to customize the program on an ad hoc basis is important as well. For example, students' goals in summer school tend to be quite different from what they would like to accomplish during the school year.

 The platform was super easy to use. The dashboard was simple and made it easy to track where kids are and see their pacing. 

Wendy Cusic

Director of Curriculum and Instruction

## Success:

The summer school session of 2015 was VDPS's first experience with Courseware. The previous year, the enrollment was limited due to the provider only providing content for grades 9 through 12. In 2014, 74 students took part with only 12 successfully completing a course. In 2015, 135 students in grades 9 through 12 successfully recovered at least one course, along with 52 middle schoolers.

For the upcoming school year, the district took the study one step further. After all, what good is credit recovery if the student is not prepared for the next course? For the first quarter of the 2015–16 school year, more than 80

percent of those middle school students were passing the subjects they had previously attended in summer school.

“Student engagement and school attitude have also improved,” Ms. Iloff added. “Last year, the number of students from the academy who participated in volunteer service projects, college campus visits, and CTE program visits doubled over the previous year.”

Student engagement and school attitude have also improved. Last year, the number of students from the academy who participated in volunteer service projects, college campus visits, and CTE program visits doubled over the previous year.

Jennifer Iloff

Success Academy Director and Teacher Mentor

### **The Future:**

The goal for Van Dyke Public Schools is to be able to scale the Success Academy’s growth with the population of the district. Van Dyke knows that Edmentum Courseware can handle the load, and it hopes to continue adding mentors as enrollment grows.

## **For more information:**

Contact [800.447.5286](tel:800.447.5286) or visit [www.edmentum.com](http://www.edmentum.com) (/) to learn more about Edmentum's online learning solutions.