

Closing the Gap at Branson School Online!

A Distance Education Solution from Class.com, Inc.



The Challenge

In a small Colorado community north of New Mexico and just east of the Continental Divide, local educators were determined to conquer another divide—the digital divide. Several years ago, the town's rural K-12 school began using technology to make some class components available to those students who needed to catch up after absences, wished to work ahead, or needed to do remedial work. In a land of vast distances, those early years of success spawned the vision of delivering full courses online to students at home on ranches or scattered in small towns across the state.

Branson School Online! had the foresight to envision a need for an alternative school program for students who wished to pursue their education from another setting, including the comfort of their homes. In 2001-2002, Branson School Online! took the bold step that allowed the district to use technology to serve students in their homes on the widely dispersed, rural plains of Southern Colorado.

Public education, after all, is about providing opportunities to all students, regardless of location. Branson's mission commits it to "...making a positive difference in the lives of children in an alternative manner that transcends the limit of time and space."

The Response

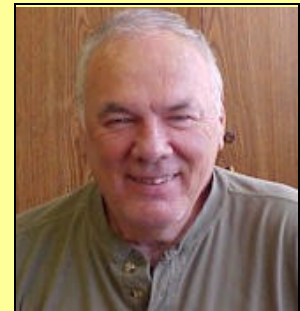
Branson School Online! is a public online alternative program available to students throughout the state of Colorado, committed to meeting the needs of a wide variety of students. Branson instructors teach all course subject areas to their assigned students, creating a strong bond between teacher, instructor, and parents. Branson's superintendent, Dr. JAlan Aufderheide, oversees a team of 45 certificated instructors, in addition to clerical assistants and support staff. The academic team, along with the school board and enthusiastic students and parents constitute a virtual community stretching throughout the state.

The digital divide is often a factor of economics, and Branson School Online! is especially innovative in addressing technical needs of its students while eliminating possible monetary barriers. Committed to the idea that public education must remain free, the school loans each student a laptop computer. The school reimburses e-learners up to \$20 per month during the school year for their Internet connection, and allots each student an additional \$25 per month for educational supplies such as printer paper and ink cartridges.

Dr. Aufderheide needed high-quality, engaging, consistent content that a wide variety of secondary students could navigate with ease. Naturally, the administration was also concerned with cost effectiveness, ongoing support, reliability, efficient installation, and training for technicians and teachers who were dispersed throughout the state. To meet those needs, Branson School Online! turned to Class.com, Inc.

"We encourage every person to be a lifelong student and **not** accept barriers just because they have always been there. Branson School OnLine! encourages you to believe that alternatives to the old models can work! What will **you** make of yourself? Take charge of your life and *Carpe Diem!*"

*Dr. J. Alan Aufderheide
Superintendent
Branson School Online!*



Challenge

Create a program that breaks the traditional barriers of time and distance while challenging students across the digital divide with rigorous, engaging content.

Solution

Create a hybrid program combining Class.com's Web-based courses and a strong sense of community between students and instructors.

Class.com, Inc.
www.class.com
888-482-5598
info@class.com

The Choice

By partnering with Branson School Online!, Class.com came full circle, returning to its own roots. Over 70 years ago, the University of Nebraska began instructing rural high school students via postal mail. An outgrowth of that university program, Class.com today serves rural students throughout the nation with flexible, self-paced, Internet-based courses developed by the very best subject-matter experts, high school teachers, technicians, and instructional designers. The result is a rigorous online secondary school curriculum that reaches across traditional school boundaries, bridging the digital divide.

Obviously, well-designed, effective courses are a necessity. But in seeking an educational partner, Branson School Online! also sought a partner with extensive experience in distance education, the ability to implement programs quickly, and reliable systems and support. Class.com came through on all counts.

Results

In 2001, 110 student applicants were admitted to Branson's initial distance education program. That initial experiment proved so successful that Branson now offers online courses to 700 students across rural Colorado. There is a growing waiting list with a goal of reaching 1,200 students in the fall of 2003.

Branson has successfully reengaged marginally performing students while attracting mainstream and accelerated students. Monitored online discussions between students and teachers create a community of shared learning. Class.com's technology solutions allow rural students with dial-up connections to work effectively online, and online teacher tools contribute to academic accomplishment.

Class.com is committed to partnering with Branson School Online! in serving students. "Class.com is a first-class operation who is very responsive to our needs," says Dr. Aufderheide. "They work with us every step of the way to ensure our ongoing success."

The flexibility and quality of the Branson program helps students by overcoming travel issues, reengaging students disillusioned with traditional settings, and offering e-learners a chance to acquire the computer skills necessary for their futures. Branson School Online! is serving a diverse population of students from a distance, continuing to close the gap in the digital (and continental) divide.

About Branson School Online!

Branson is an accredited school district in the state of Colorado. In 2001, Branson created the first online school in the state and successfully enrolled 110 students from kindergarten through grade 12. In 2002, Branson's visionary foresight allowed their program to explode with over 700 enrollments, while adding course offerings through grade 14.

About Class.com

Class.com provides over 45 online courses to secondary students by providing local school districts with complete e-learning solutions: Internet-based courses, training, software hosting, and consulting services. Through these partnerships, Class.com helps innovative educators create new learning opportunities in local communities.

A Comprehensive Course of Study for Distance Education

Standards-based content

- Engaging
- Flexible
- Immediate feedback

Administrative efficiencies

- Assessment tools
- Proven program
- Local control

Teacher tools

- Online grade book
- Communication tools
- Individualized instruction

Technical Support

- Class.com hosting
- Technical evaluation
- Ongoing support

Professional Development

- Best practices workshop
- On-site teacher training
- Class.com Users Group

Return on Investment

- Site License
- Package enrollments
- Stretch resources

