

Virtual Opportunities, Real Learning

A Credit Recovery Solution from Class.com, Inc.



The Challenge

In 1866, the first one-room school opened in what was then called Camp Collins. Twenty-five years later, the town's schools celebrated their first high school graduating class...all five students. Since then, the town has grown and prospered, becoming a vital and growing city and the home of Colorado State University. Today the public schools in and around what is now Fort Collins are administered by the Poudre School District, and the award-winning district serves approximately 24,000 students, almost 90% of whom graduate. That graduation rate is well above both the state average and the averages of neighboring states.

But as successful and sophisticated as the Poudre School District had become – or perhaps *because* of that sophistication – the people at PSD realized that they needed to find ways to provide at-risk students with viable educational alternatives.

Public education, after all, is about providing opportunities to all students, not just to some of them. The teachers, counselors, and staff at PSD were determined to do something about their disengaged and at-risk high school students—those who, because of academic, medical, social, or other issues, were failing or falling behind.

The Response

Poudre School District decided to establish a credit recovery program delivering media-rich courses over the Internet to at-risk students. Local teachers would provide students with the academic skills and motivation necessary to succeed in a (largely self-paced) e-learning environment. The program was to be available district-wide, and would serve as an educational resource for students who had experienced difficulty succeeding in a traditional high school setting.

The Choice

To help create their virtual high school, Poudre School District administrators chose Class.com. The company's course designers, technicians, and educators worked with Instructional Technology Coordinator Barb Sutter, with individual coordinators at each of the district's four high schools, and with the district itself. Together, they created an effective, student-centered, alternative learning environment.

Well-designed, effective, and engaging courses are obviously a necessity in any school environment. But in seeking an educational partner, Poudre required more than just viable courses. They also sought evidence of a solid, research-based instructional pedagogy, correlation with Colorado state standards, and a competitive pricing structure. In addition, Poudre needed a partner with a strong commitment to customer service, technological know-how, and an outstanding record of accomplishment. Class.com came through on all counts.

"Class.com has been fabulous for us to work with. From the initial training right on through, their support has been excellent."

*Barb Sutter
Instructional Technology
Coordinator
Poudre School District
Fort Collins, Colorado*



Challenge

Create a program enabling credit recovery while providing benefits of traditional teaching. Use time and technology resources to reach more students and improve at-risk student retention.

Solution

Create a hybrid program combining Class.com's courses, face-to-face instruction and discussion, and student accountability.

Results

- High credit recovery course completion
- Improved graduation and dropout rates.

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The Model

The school district challenged the idea that students can learn only in a traditional classroom setting. They know that properly engaged students can learn anywhere, any time. This vision led Poudre to combine Class.com's Internet-based courses with dedicated computer labs, overseen by knowledgeable coordinators at each school. The coordinators not only guide students, they also track attendance and performance, and turn statistics in to Sutter every month.

Students report to class every day, and their teachers keep a record of instructor-graded assignments for review and assessment purposes. These assignments are often springboards for discussion, and create additional accountability. Hard copies of assignments serve as a form of security and backup.

The goal is to set students up for success, not just insert them into an alternative environment. Therefore, matching students to the opportunity is of paramount importance, according to Sutter. "There is good communication between those making the decisions regarding student enrollments, good sound decision-making about that student. The screening process is what makes this process so successful." As Sutter points out, it's the student that's important, not the school. "Truly, the best interest of the child is the primary concern, not the virtual high school. We always have the best interests of the child in mind when selecting students for this program."

Results

It's obvious that Poudre's approach is working. ***Last year, over 150 students took advantage of this credit recovery opportunity. 98% completed their courses. As a group, their grade point average was a B-minus. As a whole, the program has measurably improved both Poudre's graduation and dropout rates.*** These students' achievements gave them the tools and skills to succeed in traditional classroom settings and further their educational opportunities. Certainly, it's an impressive achievement by any measure.

But it isn't just teachers and administrators excited about Poudre's program. The students – the most important part of the educational equation – know a success when they see one. "I can keep working at something until I get it," said one about his online math course. "Some things I get right away, and I go quickly, but other things I need to work at until I get it." Another student failed her regular science courses several times before taking part in the virtual high school. Her concept of herself and of her ability to learn changed dramatically as she completed additional online courses, and she graduated last spring. She now attends a local community college and plans to continue her education.

About The Poudre School District

The Poudre School District enrolls over 24,000 students yearly in a comprehensive educational system from kindergarten through grade 12. The district encompasses 30 elementary schools, nine junior high schools, and four senior high schools.

About Class.com

Class.com offers over 40 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 learning opportunities in local communities.

An Interdisciplinary Course of Study for Credit Recovery

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

