



# Personalized learning helps students in an independent-study school flourish

Hart-Ransom Academic Charter High School

## Overview

Hart-Ransom Academic Charter High School, a public independent-study school, uses a blended learning model to provide flexible, personalized learning to a diverse student body. The standards-aligned online curriculum provides a broad, rigorous course of study, and the teachers offer students one-on-one support. The Hart-Ransom high school program, launched in 2012, has already met with success. Enrollment has increased, and the school is expanding its use of the online curriculum.



Pearson

# Challenge

Hart-Ransom Union School District is a small, rural district containing two elementary schools—a traditional school and Hart-Ransom Academic Charter School, a public homeschool program for students in grades TK–8, established in 1995. Parents at the charter school had limited options for their children after the 8th grade. They could homeschool their children independently, or they could send them to a large, comprehensive high school.

Many parents, pleased with their children’s educational experiences at the charter school, were dissatisfied with these options and wanted their children to continue at Hart-Ransom. They urged Hart-Ransom to open a high school.

# Solution

Hart-Ransom decided to create an independent-study high school to meet student needs. The district board of trustees agreed to allocate funding for the creation of the school, and Hart-Ransom began the search for a suitable vendor to provide online learning for high school students.

In choosing a vendor, Hart-Ransom sought highly qualified teachers and a standards-aligned curriculum that met the Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC) accreditation requirements and that was aligned with the California State Standards and the online course standards developed by iNACOL (International Association for K–12 Online Learning). The school also wanted flexibility so it could maintain its commitment to providing personalized learning, a user-friendly program, and strong academic and managerial support from the vendor.

After an extensive search, the school selected Connections Learning®, a set of online courses and services now part of the Pearson Connexus™ suite of offerings, as its online learning provider. The staff received both on-site and telephone training and support in implementing the solution.

Achieving WASC accreditation, Hart-Ransom marketed itself to the community to attract students from beyond the charter elementary school. Students from traditional schools, as well as homeschooled students, attend the high school.

All students engage in blended learning. The school offers on-site wet labs for biology and chemistry, enabling students to fulfill the thirty-six hours of lab time prescribed by the A–G requirements for admission to the University of California and California State University. The labs are closely coordinated with the content of the online courses. The school is also offering an earth science lab for the first time this year, which will support the new state standards.

In addition, students can take physical education and electives such as studio art, band, choir, and theater arts on-site. The school also partners with a neighboring district to offer students Regional Occupational Program (ROP) classes. “We try to personalize” students’ educational experiences “to what the students’ interests are and where they’re headed,” commented David Cline, the principal of Hart-Ransom Academic Charter School. “We look at where they want to be after four years and then reverse engineer that so we can work with them to get there.”

## PROFILE

### City/State

Modesto, California

### School Type

Public charter  
independent-study school

### School Enrollment

56 students

### Grades

9–12

The online curriculum provides both rigor and relevance. Bradford Phelps, an 11th grader who attended the charter school and was homeschooled through the 8th grade, likes the fact that his courses are academically challenging. His mother, Antionetta Phelps, appreciates the videos and Internet resources that are part of the curriculum, commenting that Bradford's geography class was "like going on a field trip every day."

The online courses also provide great flexibility. Working at their own pace, students can take extra time if they need it to complete lessons, or they can accelerate their studies. Students can also do their classwork whenever and wherever they want, although the school holds them accountable for meeting deadlines and the pacing can be challenging for some students.

Although students must be independent learners who take charge of their education to succeed in the school, there is "a whole team of people monitoring each student," noted Cline. The faculty includes the licensed Connections Learning teachers, a Connections Learning advisory teacher, an on-site science teacher who also serves as an advisory teacher, a college and career counselor who works with each student to create a four-year plan of study, a resource teacher for students with special needs, and a paraprofessional.

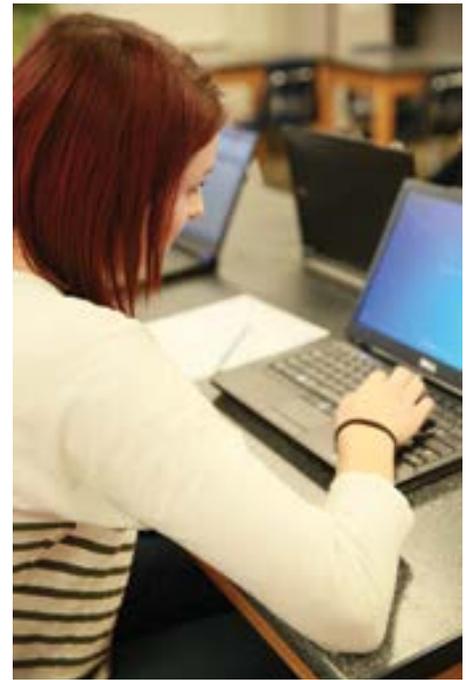
Students receive support both on-site and at home from the Hart-Ransom faculty. Two days a week, students have the option to be on campus from 9:00 a.m. to 2:30 p.m., working individually on their online courses while having the opportunity to interact with their peers. A teacher is available to answer whatever questions they may have about their lessons.

When students are off-site, Leslie Brennecke, the science and advisory teacher, is "constantly in communication with students to keep nudging them forward, giving them encouragement." Brennecke describes herself as a "learning coach" for students, but her role also includes urging parents to take an active role in monitoring their children and assessing their progress.

According to Cline, the Connections team provides "great oversight of student learning." The Connections program manager monitors the progress of all students, providing detailed reports and alerting the school about any challenges the students are facing. Cline noted that parents and students appreciate the online tutoring provided by Connections Learning as well as the teacher office hours.

Bradford values the personal attention he has received from his Connections teachers. His Spanish teacher discussed his questions over the phone and his math teacher met with him virtually in the LiveLesson® room, both making sure he understood concepts before moving on.

Antionetta Phelps, who homeschooled Bradford's five older siblings through high school, admitted that she was nervous at first about enrolling Bradford in the high school program. But she found all of his teachers to be "very warm" and "inspirational and encouraging." "It's phenomenal to release Bradford over to the academic care of these incredible people," she remarked. "I've had some conversations with them. I kept in touch over email. They are very accessible, and it's been a great opportunity for Bradford."



Photograph by Maureen Lemos

“The broad course of study that is available with Connections Learning is phenomenal, and the content is up-to-date. Our students are engaged in the learning, and it’s meaningful and applicable.”

—David Cline, Principal

# Results

Enrollment in the Hart-Ransom high school program has steadily increased, testifying to the school's success. Since the school opened, enrollment has more than doubled. Twenty-two students were enrolled in the first year, thirty-two in the second year, and forty-five in the 2014–2015 academic year. Fifty-six students are attending this year.

In the past two years, every senior graduated (no seniors were enrolled in the school's first year of operation). Half of the 2015 graduates were accepted at four-year higher education institutions. The other graduates chose to enroll in junior college or directly entered the workforce.

As the school has grown to include students with diverse needs, the administration is using Connections Learning to provide personalized learning and help them achieve success. This past summer, although the school was not open, students were able to use Connections courses for credit recovery so they could stay on track to graduate—"a saving grace for some students who needed to make up a class," Brennecke noted. Six students benefited from this opportunity and recovered credits.

Hart-Ransom is also expanding its use of Connections Learning by introducing Connections courses into the middle school. This year, one 8th grader is enrolled in Algebra I, and another is taking all core 8th-grade classes through Connections Learning.

Bradford has taken advantage of the flexibility and personalized learning afforded by the Connections classes to enroll in courses at Modesto Junior College while attending Hart-Ransom. He has already earned 21.5 units. He hopes to obtain an associate's degree by the time he graduates from high school.

Bradford's current career goal is to become a teacher. "I've seen how much good teachers influence my education, especially the Connections Learning teachers at Hart-Ransom," he explained. "And so I'd like to be that kind of influence for other students and help the students who aren't generally motivated in high school to become motivated and do well." "the 21st-century workplace," added Scott.

Kathryn, who graduated in May 2015 with a 3.89 GPA, is one such student. Looking back on her experiences in the blended learning program, Kathryn feels she became more mature. She gained self-discipline and a sense of responsibility because she had to learn how to manage her education and her time. "I feel like I'm better prepared for college by going through this program," she remarked.

Rachel Haston, Kathryn's mother, said that Kathryn's older siblings agree with her. "They envy Kathryn. They feel like college is going to be a breeze for her."

“I really like how involved the teachers are with the students. If you have any problems with the classes, you can just call a teacher and they’re always available for you.”

—Bradford Phelps, 11th Grader

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makes  
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