



PARTNERSHIP SUCCESS STORY

In a virtual academy,
teachers and families relate
learning to the real world

Elk Grove Virtual Academy



Pearson

The Challenge

Miriam Lyons, a Title I teacher, first experienced the benefits of online learning when she took virtual college courses and then taught online continuing education courses for teachers. Impressed by online learning’s adaptability, Lyons and other district personnel encouraged the Elk Grove Unified School District in California to consider offering a virtual education program. As a result, the district launched the Elk Grove Virtual Academy (EGVA) for grades K–8 in 2010.

After a year and a half, EGVA found that its online curriculum was not meeting the school’s needs for accountability. So Lyons, now EGVA’s K–3 teacher, began to search for rigorous, but flexible online learning courses that would help teachers establish student accountability.

An Online Learning Solution

Lyons’s research led her to Connections Learning®, a set of online courses and services now part of the Pearson Connexus™ suite of offerings. It took the district almost four years to approve the switch to Connections Learning because of financial constraints and the district approval process. EGVA began using the online set of courses in the 2015–2016 school year.

Students, who come from nine counties in California, work on their online courses at home, with parental support. The three EGVA teachers who guide student learning—Lyons, the grades 4–6 teacher, and the grades 7–8 teacher—communicate with students via phone, text, email, Skype, and FaceTime. “We use every aspect of technology that’s out there to connect with our students and their families as well,” said Lyons, who serves as the online program coordinator, in addition to teaching.

Twice a month, students and teachers come together, once for physical education and once for an activity in EGVA’s physical classroom or a field trip. The teachers also meet face-to-face as needed with small groups of students in their counties.

PROFILE

State

California

School Type

Public virtual academy

School Enrollment

55 students

Grades

K–8

“The flexibility of the curriculum opens up the entire world to students.”

EGVA focuses on providing personalized learning. Students' course of study is determined by their instructional level, not by their age. "Every student is getting an individualized approach to their education," Lyons said. Referring to herself and her colleagues, she added, "We see the need to engage and instruct in different ways and in different modalities, as well as using different curriculum. And Pearson's curriculum provides that."

EGVA draws a variety of students for whom a traditional brick-and-mortar school is not the right fit—athletes and actors, students with special needs, students whose parents must travel for work, and those looking for a fully supported homeschool program. The fact that the curriculum is "portable" is critical to students and their families. "Because the curriculum is available 24/7, students can access their lessons anywhere anytime," Lyons said.

The array of courses means that EGVA can match classes to students' needs and interests. "If students need essential math instead of regular math, they can have that. If they need academics at a more accelerated pace, the gifted and talented courses fill that need," remarked Lyons. "The fact that Pearson offers American Sign Language, along with the more traditional foreign languages, and other electives not typically found in a K-8 school is fabulous. Our families love that. They love the broad selection of courses that are available."

The flexibility of the online learning curriculum enables teachers to modify lessons in order to give them real-world applications. Lyons explained that 4th-grade students are required to study California history. If students visit one of the historic missions along California's coast, for example, they can get credit for doing a project that shows what they learned from their visit, instead of completing the entire online lesson on the subject.

Lyons added, "The parents love the fact that they can take what's being taught in the individual daily lessons and go out into the world and find concrete examples and experiences for their children to really reinforce it, to take it to the synthesis level instead of just the recall level. They explore the math curriculum by helping their children learn to be good cooks. They apply that math to home projects or grocery shopping."

According to Lyons, the accountability built into the courses helps the teachers provide personalized learning. With EGVA's previous program, "we were always digging for evidence that learning was happening," Lyons explained. With Pearson's online learning courses, "we can see students' daily progress and see where they need support, what they are missing, where they are excelling. Maybe they don't need the next lesson, so we can skip that lesson. It becomes very individualized."

"I think our students are performing better by just the fact that we can see how they are doing on any given lesson," Lyons said. "[We can] reinforce the right factors and provide immediate feedback on work relating to any concept or standard that might not be heading in the correct direction. The platform allows us to catch any issues very quickly."

"A lot of our colleagues are interested in what we do," Lyons remarked. When she tells them about EGVA, they exclaim, "We wish we could do that in the classroom!"

Other colleagues refer students whose needs are not being met to EGVA. Lyons observed, "They see the value of a program like this."

“What we get from Pearson is complete support, rapid responses to any of our needs, and encouragement at all levels.”

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