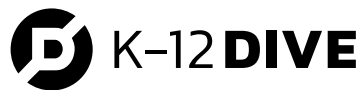




CASE STUDY

A tale of two districts

Meeting communities' diverse virtual learning needs with Pearson



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While COVID-19 transformed all our plans and processes, the disruption inflicted on education was perhaps the most overt, given its position at the heart of communities and daily family life.

As with many industries, the landscape for digital adoption was fragmented in K-12 education: Some already offered full-fledged programs, while on the other end of the spectrum were those that had only dabbled in online education and needed to quickly pivot to a more robust solution.

Fast-forward several months, and schools' ability to successfully deliver remote education has surged ahead, reaching a level of progress that otherwise might have taken years to achieve. Through that lens, the pandemic has proved to be a catalyst that has fundamentally altered education; in fact, an overwhelming 86% of respondents to the [2020 Pearson Global Learner Survey](#) said they believed online learning would remain a component of primary and secondary education. In the United States, 74% go so far as to say that students will be more apt to attend school virtually than in a traditional school within 10 years.

Whatever their preferred implementation, Pearson is able to support districts and foster turnkey partnerships that provide stability and expertise during a time of upheaval.

Here we explore two very different journeys to a thriving online environment that allowed schools to meet the needs of families during COVID-19 and beyond.

Troy Intersect Virtual School expands on a successful virtual learning program

A rich history of remote learning

As part of Michigan's Troy School District, the Troy Intersect Virtual School launched during the 2012–2013 school year as a virtual-first school with the goal of developing lifelong learners in a student-centered approach. Students use the Pearson Connexus online learning platform to link to teachers, lessons, and classmates, with a world-class curriculum aligned to Michigan content standards and tailored to each child's needs, talents, interests, and learning style.

As schools abruptly closed in March 2020, few were equipped as well as Troy Intersect Virtual School, which was already configured for a dynamic remote-education experience. The school relies on Pearson to deliver a full suite of instructional services, from training to implementation, using Pearson-provided, Michigan state-certified teachers.

Unexpected benefit of online school

Greater flexibility and variety in the courses provide more choices.



The model supports appropriate grade-level instruction. K–5 teachers cover all subjects, much as in a brick-and-mortar classroom. For middle-school and high-school students who need more specialized instruction, subject-specific teachers tackle core classes, supplemented by an advisory teacher who affords an additional layer of reinforcement by tracking each student on a dashboard to view their progress holistically.

Unexpected benefit of online school

Classrooms can seamlessly flex to online work if the in-class portion of a hybrid model is disrupted.

Instructors then extend flexible levels of assistance for students who have fallen behind or have questions; for example, a teacher might reach out with personalized instruction during a lull in classwork or meet with a student who has proactively visited during “office hours.”

Using Pearson’s proven curriculum, teachers provide a blend of instruction. During live sessions, they deliver lessons where they may show a video or PowerPoint to explain a concept or demonstrate an approach on a whiteboard in a classroom-style format that encourages active participation. Those interactive lessons are complemented with asynchronous learning where students move at their own pace, receiving extra help if they are struggling or accelerating their lessons with additional content in areas where they are more confident.





Success Stories

One student at Troy Intersect Virtual School found they excelled when distractions were minimized in the online format, compared with being in a room full of students. They could read through materials on their own time and pause and replay when more time was needed to assimilate a concept.

Meeting expanding needs generated by COVID-19

Given that Troy Intersect Virtual School was already set up to offer remote learning, program coordinator Olivia Svacha said interest spiked over the summer as it became clear fellow schools were still grappling with their plans for the fall.

“We received feedback that parents were looking for something tried and true after the disappointing spring experience when teachers weren’t prepared to instruct online,” she said.

In addition, she found families wanted something consistent, rather than the constant unknowns that beset many schools as they fluctuated between in-person, hybrid, and fully online instruction because of changing conditions. “Parents wanted to avoid putting their students through the disruption this uncertainty causes, especially with the other financial and emotional stressors many are currently feeling,” she said.

By expanding their existing relationship with Pearson, Troy was able to remove a major burden from the district as they strove to meet the challenge of presenting both in-person and online learning. In the 2020–2021 school year, they saw a 70% increase in full-time enrollment in their already-established online program.

Besides being the perfect solution to the challenges wrought by COVID-19, remote learning also allows districts to cater to additional students who attend in a blended model; here they supplement in-person learning with specialized courses that are difficult to deliver face-to-face, either because of insufficient demand or because they lacked a teacher with mastery of a particular topic.

For Troy Intersect Virtual School, that includes core courses, electives, AP® courses, world languages, and career and technical education. **“Because we already have the infrastructure necessary for personalized virtual instruction, we can expand our repertoire and teach niche material to smaller cohorts cost-effectively,” Svacha explained. “With Pearson, we can maximize our options while actively managing our budget.”**

2020 taught everyone to expect the unexpected, and Troy Intersect Virtual School stands ready to continue serving its students in whatever format evolves.

Unexpected benefit of online school

Families prefer the safety and convenience.





Pinnacle Charter School launches new endeavor to level up remote instruction

Improvisation makes way for more holistic solution

Pinnacle Charter School, in Federal Heights, Colorado, started in 1997 and currently serves more than 2,000 students in grades K–12. A member of the Colorado Charter School Institute, its mission is to create a safe, supportive school community that prepares students for college or career. Since COVID-19, Pinnacle has introduced Pearson Connexus to better serve its families, whether meeting in-person, in a hybrid model, or exclusively online. Specifically, Pinnacle engaged Pearson's Virtual School in a Box solution, and they elected to use their own district teachers empowered by specialized training from Pearson.

When COVID-19 first hit in March 2020, Pinnacle Charter School went into crisis teaching mode and adopted what it knew, which was Google Classroom. While this temporary measure theoretically offered online education, in that teachers were able to present the curriculum that they normally would in-person, the school recognized that it wasn't an effective virtual-first solution.

“We knew this stopgap wasn’t sustainable, and that we had to be forward-thinking in assuming that schools were unlikely to open as usual in the fall,” said Josh Cochran, chief academic officer at Pinnacle Charter School.

The school administrators realized they'd have to reinvent their view of typical education to successfully pivot to meet the new demands of fall 2020. They began researching options to help their community thrive as they transitioned from a traditional brick-and-mortar public school to an online environment. Compounding the challenge was that the school serves a largely high-needs community: 85% of its students receive free or reduced-price lunch, and 80% receive English to Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) instruction.



Unexpected benefit of online school

Students can work at their own pace, which benefits both those who are accelerated and those who need extra support.

Pinnacle knew it needed curriculum designed specifically for an online environment to effectively reach its students. Jessica Hunter, elementary STEM coordinator, joined an exploratory committee and homed in on Pearson Connexus while talking to other schools about potential platforms.

“Charter schools are quick to share what’s working, which is what first brought Pearson to our attention,” Cochran explained. “When I conducted further research, I realized Pearson offered brilliant synergy. They started as a publisher, then did state testing, and then came out with curriculum and started their own school. That cohesiveness made it a no-brainer,” Cochran said.

Unexpected benefit of online school

The curriculum gives more consideration to emotional health and well-being, offering personalization and flexibility in how students structure daily schedules and assignments.





Helping students flourish with a robust online learning option

In May, the team decided to allow families to choose between a hybrid format, called Pinnacle Direct, which was configured for two days a week of in-person learning and three days a week of online learning, or commit to a 100% online program that they dubbed “Pinnacle Connect,” a play on the name of the Pearson Connexus platform.

Through this proactive approach, Pinnacle staff had the summer to work out details so they could start the school year seamlessly with Pearson Connexus.

Unexpected benefit of online school

Equal access for kids, especially for those with physical or mental health challenges.

Over the ensuing months, they took four key steps to ensure success:

- Connecting with College Park Academy in Riverdale, Maryland, a school that had been using Pearson Connexus, to learn from its experiences with everyday use.
- Enlisting Pearson trainers for intensive coaching to help their 140 teachers become experts in the curriculum.
“This is where the teachers’ buy-in really shifted,” Hunter said. “They realized they weren’t just being given a prescriptive block of material, but they could make it theirs and customize it for their students.”
- Piloting the online option with 130 students who were enrolled in Pinnacle’s June summer school program.
- Conducting ongoing professional development throughout the school year.



Another important strategy was thorough communication with families to instill the confidence that their kids had the same access to a rigorous curriculum and resource set, whether in school or at home. One key element was a bilingual onboarding and training session to ensure every family understood the many features of the online platform.

While surrounding school districts pushed back their start dates because they were uncertain about their programming, Pinnacle Charter School had its first day on August 31, 2020, as planned, with Pearson Connexus in place. Enrollment surged by 100 students, and families were delighted with the superior experience compared with Google Classroom. “We were able to explain that this wasn’t a generic nationwide curriculum; we are a local school that now has a customized online option,” Cochran said.

The self-directed model has proved advantageous. Now, when kids demonstrate mastery, they can open up new lessons so they can work ahead at their own pace. Cochran reported that 18 students were able to fulfill their graduation requirements in the fall semester, allowing them to join the workforce in the winter.

Success Stories

A third grader at Pinnacle Charter School was able to challenge themselves by transitioning to fourth-grade materials that were readily accessible on Pearson Connexus. Instead of relying on supplementary enrichment work, they were able to delve into the more challenging curriculum for a more meaningful experience.

Conversely, this program choice boosts the ability of students to access more support as needed. For example, an ESOL student at Pinnacle Charter School was able to thrive in an accelerated high-school math course while using lower-level programming for language arts.

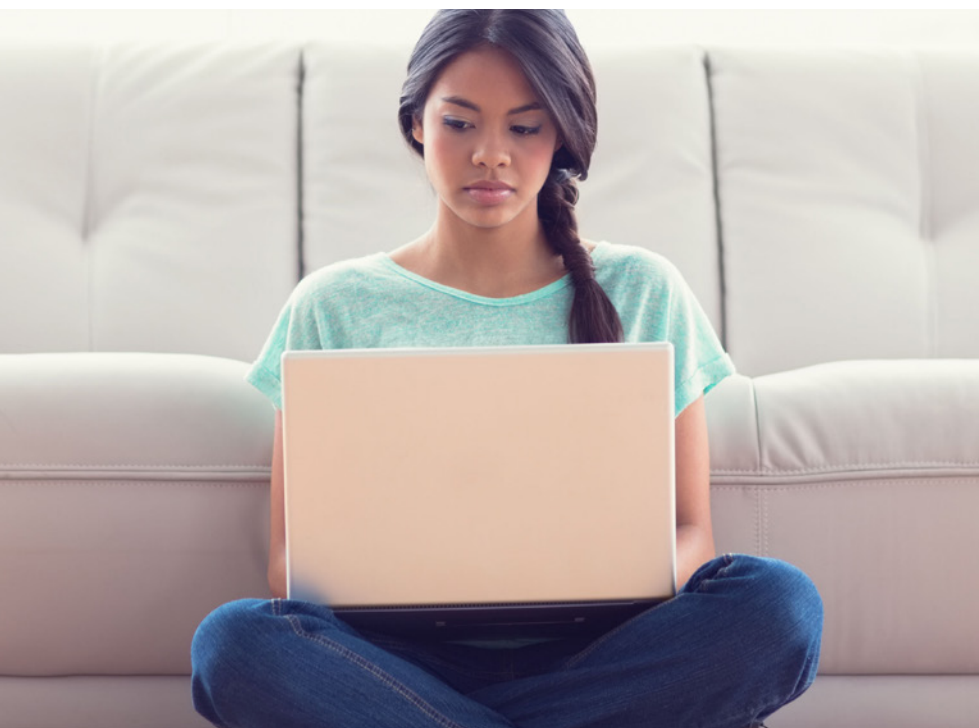


Another feature of Pearson Connexus is its single point of entry, which alleviates the confusion many families experienced when they weren't sure where to find documents or what menus to click through in the early days of remote learning.

“This platform is much more user-friendly for novice tech users,” Cochran pointed out.

It also presents a high degree of flexibility, vital in today's fluid situation. If a class or grade level is quarantined because of COVID-19, they can shift to the online option and continue to learn at home without missing a beat. And, for better or worse, it makes snow days a thing of the past.

Most important, the schools appreciate they can meet the needs of their student populations, despite a challenging environment that will lead to declining enrollments and funding in many districts. **“I see schools that are losing families to home schooling or other options when we actually were able to increase enrollment. I think we were one of the only schools in our area that can say that, and it's because we have been able to diversify how we've implemented education,” Cochran said. “We are proud that we can protect our school, no matter what the future holds.”**



Success Stories

At Pinnacle Charter School, 18 seniors were able to accelerate their work to finish their credits and complete graduation requirements in December, allowing them to join the workforce a semester early.

Unexpected benefit of online school

“Students will be far more prepared for college; with so much independence, they are empowered to create their own schedules because there isn’t somebody standing over their shoulder, directing them on what to do next.”

Olivia Svacha,
Program Coordinator,
Troy Intersect Virtual School



Lessons learned one year into COVID-19

As schools considered their options, many turned to Pearson, a partner they trusted to meet their unique needs as they continued to provide learning experience for their students. In some cases, districts expanded a successful program to serve more local families by engaging Pearson’s experienced certified online teachers. Others chose to leverage Pearson’s infrastructure and rapidly launch and deploy a program that used their own teachers and staff.

While districts chose the path that met their specific needs, Pearson Connexus’ flexible models allowed them to respond to the challenges of COVID-19 and reap the benefits of online learning — however that might look going forward.



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