



A high school in an underserved community uses blended learning to prepare its students for success

Franklinton Preparatory Academy

The Challenge

For 30 years, students in the Franklinton community in Columbus, Ohio—an underserved community facing grave socioeconomic challenges—were bused all over the city to attend school.

So in August 2013, Franklinton Preparatory Academy (FPA), a public charter high school, opened its doors to give students a school they could call their own. According to Marty Griffith, the principal and founder of the school, FPA's "mission is to give Franklinton youth who otherwise would probably be following a trajectory that would lead to places where they weren't being contributing members of society the opportunity to become valued, contributing leaders."

"It's really about individualizing education so we prepare our students to be successful after they leave us," he added. "Hopefully they stay here in Franklinton, and they help revitalize their neighborhood."

To fulfill its mission, FPA created a blended learning environment, with the goal of providing personalized learning for every student.



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A Blended Learning Solution

Researching online programs that could serve as the foundation for FPA's blended learning approach, Griffith kept running up against the same problems. The programs were bulky and not user-friendly, and the course offerings lacked breadth.

When he learned about GradPoint®, a set of online courses and services now part of the Pearson Connexus™ suite of offerings, he felt he had found a solution that would help the school succeed in its mission.

At FPA, blended learning takes two main forms. The majority of students are enrolled in the school's brick-and-mortar program, where they attend classes full-time in the school building. Students choose this program because they want to go to a neighborhood school and because it provides a small, safe, family-oriented learning environment.

The curriculum for the brick-and-mortar program consists of teacher-discovered resources along with materials from GradPoint. "The American History teacher can pull up lessons or specific units or specific examples from the GradPoint course work and use that as an integrated part of the face-to-face instruction," explained Anne Hyland, FPA's teacher leader, who works with the faculty to improve teaching and learning.

"We utilize GradPoint as our primary instructional curriculum," Griffith remarked. "A lot of our teachers rely on it as their textbook."

In the school's hybrid model, students use the online courses to complete their high school credits off campus. They meet with teachers every two weeks in the school building, or teachers visit them in their homes to touch base.

In between the brick-and-mortar and hybrid models of online and blended learning, there are "as many permutations as you can imagine," Griffith said. For example, one period a day, students might use the online solution independently in school to take a psychology or a sports management course, while the rest of their classes are teacher facilitated.

The large variety of courses included in the online solution lets FPA meet students' needs and allows students to pursue their interests. "At one point last year, we had students enrolled in 119 different classes," Griffith said. "We can't begin to offer that kind of variety to students on a face-to-face basis," explained Hyland. "GradPoint really opens up lots of options," she added.

PROFILE

City/State

Columbus, Ohio

School Type

Public charter school

School Enrollment

150 students

Grades

9-12

Students Receiving Free and Reduced-Price Lunch

92.9%

Students with Disabilities

21.6%

Mobility Rate

32%

Ethnicity

- 53.3% White
- 29% Black
- 12.4% Multiracial
- 5.3% Other



In the brick-and-mortar setting, FPA has been able to use the online courses to offer personalized learning because the content is so deep.

Citing the Algebra I course as an example, Griffith said, “Teachers can find a particular lesson on a particular topic that six students in their class are having a hard time with.” Then they “can decide the best ways to provide access to the material, including differentiating access to meet individual needs.” Students can look at the lesson online, the teachers can print it and use it as a handout, or students can work on it in groups. Teachers can also manipulate the lesson digitally, customizing it to meet students’ needs. “I think teachers like that flexibility,” Griffith commented.

The online solution’s flexibility has also helped the school address one of its biggest challenges, what Hyland described as “finding a way to have students keep moving forward in their learning.” There is a high mobility rate among students and a lack of consistent attendance, “which almost never have anything to do with the students,” she explained. “It really has to do with families and the life situations students find themselves in.” As a result, students enroll in FPA with “completely jumbled-up transcripts,” according to Griffith.

Students often arrive at the school with partial credits, and the school uses the online courses to prevent them from having to start over. For example, taking a GradPoint assessment, students can test out of material and earn a half credit for the concepts they have already mastered. That half credit combined with a partial credit they have already earned gives them a full credit.

FPA can also use the online lessons to create a class that covers just the units a student needs to complete in order to earn a credit. For example, Griffith explained, if a student is ready to graduate except she lacks half a credit in health, FPA can select the specific lessons in the GradPoint health class that address the Ohio expectations she needs to master and create a customized course just for her.

For students doing their course work independently online, the solution “gives them success that they may not have had before,” Hyland remarked. According to Griffith, the online courses keep students motivated and on track. “Students can, without needing adult facilitation, self-guide through most of what they need to get done.”

If students pass pre-tests, they can move on to content they have yet to master. Aware of their own personal learning expectations and in charge of their time, they can pace themselves as needed as they follow their learning plan. They can do their course work at any time during the day or night or on weekends and holidays, which is particularly important since many students hold jobs.

“GradPoint allows you to hone instruction to a very individualized level, partly because it’s so wonderfully deep.”

— Marty Griffith, Principal and Founder, FPA

The Results

FPA is pleased with the success it has seen so far.

When FPA opened in 2013, 47 students were enrolled in the school. Now in its fourth year, the school has seen enrollment triple to 150 students. It will reach capacity when enrollment increases to 200.

Six students, who enrolled as juniors in FPA's first year, graduated in 2015. All of the students now have jobs.

Of the 20 students who graduated from FPA in 2016, 2 are attending a four-year college and 7 are enrolled in a community college. One student enlisted in the military. Other graduates are working in restaurants or have sales positions, and 2 are shift managers in retail establishments.

Five of the 20 graduates in 2016 had enrolled in FPA as freshman during the school's first year. Attending the brick-and-mortar program full-time, the students earned additional credits by accessing GradPoint off campus. As a result, they were able to accelerate and complete their graduation requirements a year early.

Reflecting on FPA's impact so far, Griffith said, "We have come into a really challenged community. There are a lot of challenged families, a lot of challenged youth. We are giving young people a very tangible, physical place right in their own community where they can be appreciated, cared for, and educated. They are able to use the school as a touchpoint to go back out into the community and begin applying positive life lessons for success."

"We provide opportunities for young people to be successful, and we give them hope," he added. "If we weren't doing that, then we wouldn't have any reason to be here."

“What I like about GradPoint is the fact that you can set your own pace and that it is easy to follow along in the courses.”

— 11th-Grade Student, FPA

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