



## Success Story

Washoe County School District

WASHOE COUNTY, NEVADA

**Takeaway:** By creating “blended courses,” educators have the tools to provide curriculum to educate their population of over 60,000 students online, in-person, or in a hybrid environment.

### Flexible Curriculum Options to Continue Learning After the Pandemic

Washoe County School District in Reno, Nevada, originally partnered with Edgenuity® to offer students opportunities to recover credits and take initial credit courses when they needed flexible scheduling. As a result of the pandemic and associated changes in teaching and learning, Washoe County SD pivoted to provide online curriculum to all of their more than 60,000 students.

Less than one year into their implementation, Stacey Cooper, Administrator of Extended Studies, expanded their online course offerings to include AP®, college prep, CTE, and honors courses, as well as all of the traditional courses offered through Edgenuity.

#### LESSONS LEARNED

Like many administrators, Cooper and her team at Washoe County were “building the plane while we were flying it,” and learned some lessons along the way. “No school district is perfect,” she said, “and the more humbly we represent what we’ve learned, the more we can build a community culture around learning.”

Even with a rocky start to online learning and no time to train educators on the new system, Washoe County is seeing data trends far above other districts in the area. Some teachers are seeing 82% of students with a passing grade, and overall, the number of course completions have been impressive, especially considering the restraints presented by the pandemic.



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## ADVICE FOR OTHERS

### 1. Scaffold course enrollments so students only see 2–3 classes at a time

Initially, students were given their full course load online, but Cooper and her team found this to be overwhelming in the first semester. In the second semester of the 2020–2021 school year, they chose to give their students only two to three classes in six-week blocks. This has helped students focus on a smaller number of subjects and reduced feelings of confusion and anxiety spurred by the overwhelming number of courses.

### 2. Encourage and facilitate teacher and student interaction

Washoe County also assigned students to Microsoft Teams to allow them to check in with a core academic teacher for targeted tutoring support. They can also engage and collaborate with other students in this environment, which provides the support they need while working remotely. If the teachers saw a dip in performance, they would send targeted invitations to office hours.

### 3. Partner with your provider

“I was placed in this role with Washoe County three days before the pandemic hit. I leaned on the customer service crew at Edgenuity heavily to get us up and running in the course of two weeks, and I cannot put into words the amount of support they gave us. If a school is looking at online curriculum, find out about their customer service because you can’t do this alone. You need the support of your curriculum platform and company,” said Cooper.

## WORKING WITH PARENTS AND FAMILIES

“If I had all limitations removed, I would’ve informed parents fully and transparently around the challenges we were facing,” said Cooper, but with a time crunch and limited resources, they did the best they could. “The pandemic pushed us so rapidly forward we were constantly moving and cleaning up mistakes afterward,” said Cooper, and she added that she is looking forward to purposeful and collaborative planning with their families as they move into next year.

In addition to improving access to materials on their district’s website, she also attributed the change from assigning students 6–7 courses at a time to 2–3 courses over 6-week blocks to feedback from families. “Now that we’re past the learning curve, things are going much smoother,” she said.

## LOOKING FORWARD: FLEXIBILITY FOR STUDENTS THROUGH BLENDED LEARNING

In the state of Nevada, the Department of Education approves the curriculum, and after it has been approved, districts cannot deviate. So, Washoe County turned to the Edgenuity course catalog and created a “blended learning shell” for every course. It follows the state-approved curriculum while enabling teachers to modify and adjust the course as needed. These courses can be used to modify or supplement classroom instruction, or they can be used completely online.



These courses could save students from failing.” **STACEY COOPER, ADMIN. OF EXTENDED STUDIES**

“We hosted Zoom meetings with the schools to present the blended learning classes to the teachers, but they were skeptical about implementing them,” said Cooper. That was true until she emphasized that they can be used for English language learners and special education students.

“The blended learning courses allow us the flexibility to make needed adjustments for exceptional students,” she said. And now, the majority of the middle schools have left the standard online model and adopted their blended learning courses.

As Washoe County begins to prepare for more traditional, in-person learning for the 2021–2022 school year, they will continue to offer these blended learning courses. “These courses could save students from failing,” said Cooper and provided the following example. If a student fails two units, instead of waiting for them to fail the entire semester, they can retake the units through the blended course and replace those failed grades.

As they look toward next year, they will seek out creative ways to close the achievement gap, such as with bridge readiness programs, credit recovery, and credit accrual programs to help students fast-forward their learning to maintain their graduation trajectory. The blended learning courses and Edgenuity curriculum will be a big part of that initiative, and Cooper anticipates higher than normal enrollment.

“We’ve been forced to think outside the box when it comes to education,” said Cooper, “and we need to be stewards of our experience to advocate for federal and state government to maintain creative approaches to education.”