



Success Story

Berks County Intermediate Unit

READING, PENNSYLVANIA

Takeaway: Berks Online Learning program in Pennsylvania has helped students of all ages reach their academic goals by partnering with districts to offer virtual online classes.

Virtual Teachers Create Outstanding Relationships

Strong student-teacher relationships are a key indicator of student success, yet developing these relationships can feel difficult through a computer screen. “Can I just say how fantastic the Edgenuity teachers are? They are the secret sauce to my program’s success,” gushed Marcelle McGhee, Berks Online Learning program administrator. “Parents regularly comment on how much they and their students love the teachers.” By partnering with [Edgenuity® Instructional Services](#), Berks County Intermediate Unit offers select Pennsylvania school districts the ability to provide online learning opportunities to their students.

Currently, McGhee works with five school districts, offering online learning opportunities for nearly 1,200 students in 2021. The flexibility of Instructional Services courses allows students to enroll in classes when they need and work through them at their own pace.

STUDENTS AND FAMILIES REQUEST FLEXIBILITY

For some students, “traditional school isn’t working for them,” said McGhee, as she explained that online learning allows them to be successful in their education. When she and her team began Berks Online Learning over 11 years ago, the first summer program focused mainly on credit recovery classes. But interest in the program soared, and students and families weren’t just looking for credit recovery anymore; they wanted courses that offered original credit. The program then began to offer Accelerated summer courses, and advanced students appreciated the flexibility of taking summer classes, and many middle- and high-school students used the opportunity to prepare for the upcoming year or to get ahead on credits.



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– MARCELLE MCGHEE, BERKS ONLINE LEARNING PROGRAM ADMINISTRATOR

McGhee quickly expanded course offerings to accommodate the increased demand and now partners with districts to offer over 200 courses to students, grades K–12. “It’s all about flexibility and being able to customize,” McGhee said as she explained why students seek virtual course opportunities. And with Edgenuity’s Instructional Services teachers and Berks County IU staff, [every student receives support](#) and encouragement from highly qualified, state-certified teachers.

For summer 2021, Berks Online Learning is excited to expand its virtual Summer Academy with a three-week summer camp featuring Edgenuity teachers for students Grades 3–5 and a booster course program for Grades 6–12 students. The Edgenuity Instructional Services teachers will be key to the Summer Academy success.

STUDENT-TEACHER RELATIONSHIPS

Over the past 11 years, Edgenuity teachers have proven themselves to be “open and available to help students,” said McGhee, and that support helps students feel comfortable with a new way of learning. Teachers go from helping students log in and working through technical issues to assisting struggling students with challenging activities. Plus, they even reach out to parents or guardians to help them understand the program and platform.

McGhee has also established additional supports for students with special needs and works alongside Edgenuity’s Virtual Teachers and [Special Education Coordinators](#) to provide appropriate accommodations for students. For every student, McGhee considers their backstory and their specific needs. If she learns they have special needs, require remediation, or may benefit from other supports, she will download the course’s scope and sequence and work with the Special Education Manager or course teacher to ensure the student’s needs are met.

With Instructional Services, students can reach out to their virtual teacher for help, attend office hours, schedule one-on-one time, or work with concept coaches available with Edgenuity’s on-demand tutoring.

From the very beginning of a student’s enrollment, parent involvement is also encouraged and accessible. During orientation, McGhee requires parents to create an account to access the family portal. She encourages parents and families to set up automatic progress reports to stay up-to-date on student activity and grades. If a student falls behind, the parents are one of the first to know so they can help support intervention plans as a team.

THRIVING DURING SCHOOL CLOSURES

With a well-established virtual program in place, the schools partnering with Berks County Intermediate Unit for online courses were in a good position when schools closed in March of 2020. McGhee emphasized that while online learning was new to many students and families, the expertise and experience of Edgenuity’s teachers gave Berks Online Learning a head-start. “We were already in place; we already had an online program, we just had to coordinate and enroll massive amounts of students,” she said.

“ [The teachers] have been absolutely awesome. The parents love them, and the students love them.” – MARCELLE MCGHEE, BERKS ONLINE LEARNING PROGRAM ADMINISTRATOR

K–5 students were particularly affected by school closures as their needs are different from their middle- and high-school counterparts. But Edgenuity’s K–5 teachers helped cultivate relationships to keep students and their families engaged in this new way of learning. [Edgenuity’s K–5](#) teachers helped students log in and get familiar with the program during the early days of the pandemic. McGhee explained that the consistency of the program and the teachers’ support gave students and their families a sense of stability in an incredibly uncertain time.

By partnering with [Edgenuity Instructional Services](#), Berks County Intermediate Unit has maintained a focus on student success. Strong teacher-student relationships have been essential as they forged ahead with online learning and expanded exponentially over the last 11 years. “[The teachers] have been absolutely awesome,” said McGhee. “The parents love them, and the students love them.”