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The Case for Online Credit Recovery Courses

Standards-Based Education has significantly changed the primary goal of education, but course structures have been slow to catch up with that idea. In the past, *time* was the constant, and *learning* was the variable. In other words, we educated a student for a certain length of time and then measured the results. If the student's performance did not meet a minimum standard, then the student was doomed to repeat that entire process again, as if nothing was learned the first time. In Standards-Based Education, learning is supposed to be the *constant* and time the *variable*. A student is required to meet the standards of the course, and the length of time it takes is not important. Unfortunately, traditional course design does not allow this to happen; repeating a course is still the only option for a failing student. A diagnostic driven *Credit Recovery* course is a way to overcome that obstacle.

The Digital Learning Commons (DLC) has offered Aventa Learning's credit recovery courses to Washington State schools since fall 2005. "Our schools recognize the benefits that this model offers to students frustrated by the prospect of having to repeat an entire semester's content. All students learn something the first time through a course and the credit recovery diagnostics help to reward the student for that knowledge while at the same time focusing on the areas of deficiency," said Leslie St. Pierre, DLC's Assistant Director of Course Support.

A diagnostic driven *Credit Recovery* course is designed to give an expanded opportunity for students who did not succeed the first time they took a course, but who did learn some of the standards and benchmarks in the course. Students are given the opportunity in each learning unit to demonstrate prior learning in that area of study. If they demonstrate competency on these pre-assessments, they are excused from the corresponding part of the learning activities. Students are not excused from all activities, and they are still required to take the summative assessments that measure their entire knowledge of the material. This ensures that the essential content of the course is mastered. "This makes for a highly individualized experience which is imperative to the credit recovery learner," said St. Pierre.

Wisconsin Virtual School, a statewide supplemental online program, serves 60% at risk and alternative education students in its sixth year of operation. Online Credit Recovery courses have been an excellent opportunity for students to capture graduation credits and specifically target the areas of learning they did not achieve in the face-to-face classroom. WVS believes these courses outshine other programmed recovery courses in that they utilize content specific teachers for facilitating the learning of the at risk or alternative education student. NCLB requires highly qualified teachers for all



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students and these courses have met and exceeded that indicator. The courses are engaging and have high expectations. Students appreciate the opportunity of flexibility to course access and being able to target their areas of needs to further their goal of graduation.

A WVS student commented, " I am an 18 year old man. I had messed up my junior year and did not do what was required. I now have to make up for loss time. I am looking forward to graduating on time. I am not sure what to do with the rest of my life, but I know I can not go any further without a diploma."

Local Education Mentors or LEGs in the WVS program are critical to the success of a student making the most of their online experience. Regarding credit recovery and a highly qualified teacher, a mentor emailed the online teacher and said, "Thanks so much. Our student is graduating this year and you can be very proud that you have helped a young lady through a very challenging time. She is a great example of how this program can benefit students. I appreciate your commitment."

Taking a diagnostic driven credit recovery course online offers several significant advantages over a traditional summer school program. The most important advantage is that it can be taken at any time during the year. A student who fails the first semester of Algebra I may have to wait until summer to make up the credit. More importantly, that student has to wait until summer to make up the *learning*. In the meantime, he or she is taking the second semester of Algebra I without the benefit of that missing learning. This often leads to the student finishing the second semester with another failed course to make up. With an online diagnostic driven credit recovery course, the student can get the critical learning necessary for the second semester before that course is failed as well, thus saving the student a second semester of futility.

Online Credit Recovery offers advantages even when taken during the summer. Attending a physical summer school class often presents problems for students who have jobs or traveling plans during that time. With an asynchronous online program, students can do their work at any time of the day or from anywhere in the world that they can access the Internet.

Online Credit Recovery courses are an effective use of technology that allows us to focus on actual student learning as a standard of student performance, rather than the amount of time the student sat in a classroom. This is an important step in helping bring a high level of student achievement to everyone.