Proof Points: Blended Learning Success in School Districts

SPOKANE PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Spokane, Washington

INTRODUCTION

Spokane Public Schools has developed and implemented blended learning in numerous programs across the district with a goal of increasing graduation rates and college and career readiness. Using blended and personalized learning in conjunction with other programs, including credit advancement and an inventive alternative school, as well as leveraging district-created online curriculum, the district has increased its graduation rate from 60% in 2007 to 83% in 2014.

KEY ASPECTS OF BLENDED LEARNING PROGRAM

- The Individual Credit Advancement Now (ICAN) program is a blended course-recovery program for middle and high school students. It uses online courses that the district developed to help middle school students gain skills necessary for promotion to the next grade level and high school students meet on-time graduation goals.

- On Track Academy is an alternative school using a blended, personalized approach to keep students in school and help them earn a high school diploma. Students typically enter On Track Academy when they are behind in credit accumulation.

- A total of 15 middle, high, and alternative schools are developing and implementing blended-learning plans to support school-identified program innovations.

- Many elements of the blended-learning programs are based on the content, technology platform, teaching, and experience of the district's virtual school—Spokane Virtual Learning (SVL). District-created online curriculum, aligned with the brick-and-mortar curriculum and assessments, are used for blended and personalized learning, student interventions, special education, and student homework help being used by more than 10,000 students.

Spokane, WA

District Profile

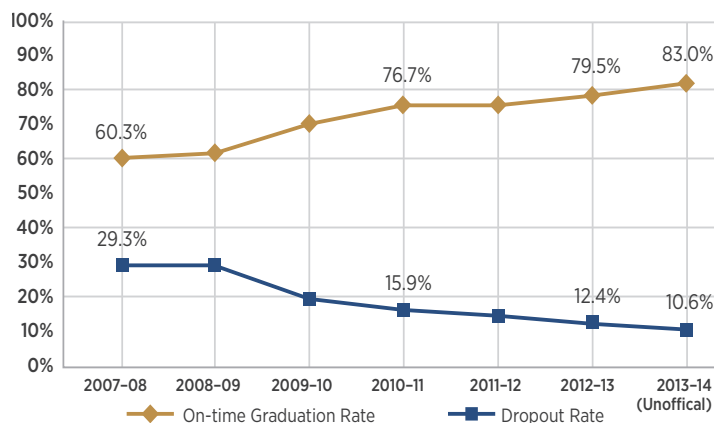Spokane Public Schools, Spokane, Washington

29,275 students, including 1,314 English Language Learners who collectively speak 56 different languages

Thirty-four K–6 elementary schools, six middle schools, six high schools

57% of students qualify for free and reduced-price lunch

Among districts in Washington State, Spokane has the third-highest number of students living in poverty; its percentage of students living in poverty is in the top third of districts in the state

Blended Learning Success Proof Point

- ✓ Graduation rates in Spokane have increased by 23 percentage points since 2008.

SPS GRADUATION RATES

	On-time Graduation Rate	Dropout Rate
2007–08	60.3%	29.3%
2008–09		
2009–10		
2010–11	76.7%	15.9%
2011–12		
2012–13	79.5%	12.4%
2013–14 (Unoffical)	83.0%	10.6%

BLENDED LEARNING AT SPOKANE PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Nearly six years ago, Spokane Public Schools' leaders looked at the school district's low graduation rate and decided it was not good enough for the district to graduate two out of every three students. They set out to create new options to keep students in school, lower the dropout rate, and increase the number of students graduating college and career ready. Among the numerous new programs and community partnerships were several programs using blended learning. The district already had a successful online program, called Spokane Virtual Learning (SVL), and was able to build on its existing online-learning experience and assets to help build blended-learning solutions.

In the 2014–15 school year, Spokane has a total of 15 schools that are using blended learning in a variety of ways. Several blended programs have already had measurable impacts on increasing the district's on-time graduation rate. These include the ICAN program and On Track Academy, both of which serve a significantly higher percentage of at-risk students than the district as a whole.

ICAN provides online course recovery for students using online courses developed by SVL, with pre-assessments that allow students to test through the standards they have already mastered and fill in the knowledge and skills for areas they need to recover. ICAN classrooms are located at each Spokane middle and high school, and students access the online and face-to-face teacher support they need to recover courses or specific standards at their school, usually before or after school.

On Track Academy creates an individualized learning plan for each student that puts the student on a path toward a technical degree or a two- or four-year college degree. District leaders initially created On Track Academy as a temporary solution to increase the district's graduation rate, but the program has been so successful that it has become a permanent accredited high school in the district. Most students enrolling in On Track Academy are behind in credit accumulation or are lacking in competencies to pass state assessments, often as a result of multiple school transfers, homelessness, or family responsibilities that keep them from attending school regularly. On Track Academy is housed next to the NEWTECH Skill Center with a morning and afternoon schedule so that students can access skill center programs, as well as work with highly qualified teachers to meet their individual learning goals. The school has three different sub-academies that are differentiated to meet student needs: The STEM Academy focuses on math and science; the PATH Academy is for students who have an interest in a technical education; the FLEX Academy is for students who are not able to attend the physical school regularly and relies more heavily than the others on online courses.

> *"Blended Learning is a natural next step to help all students to be able to learn at their own pace and to get the assistance that they need, just in time, right when they are needing it."*
>
> **— Kristin Whiteaker, Director, Spokane Virtual Learning**

PROVEN RESULTS

- In the 2013–14 school year, the high school ICAN program had 813 course enrollments with an 87% completion rate. The middle school ICAN program had 339 course interventions with an 83% completion rate.

- On Track Academy has 280 students attending in the 2014–15 school year and had a graduation rate of 90% in 2014.

Most importantly, these blended programs have been a key part of the overall district strategy to improve graduation rates and have helped Spokane Public Schools improve its graduation rate by 23 percentage points since 2008.

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KEEPING PACE WITH DIGITAL LEARNING

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