



A blended learning school personalizes education for every student

Val Verde Academy, Val Verde Unified School District,
Moreno Valley, California

The Challenge

When Val Verde Academy (VVA) opened its doors in 2010, its founders wanted to create a nurturing, blended learning environment that personalized education for every student. They envisioned a school that would provide accelerated learning for students seeking to advance their studies and personalized learning for students facing medical, social, emotional, or personal challenges. To achieve this goal, VVA sought a rigorous online curriculum that met state and district requirements and was easily customizable to meet individual students' needs.



Pearson

A Blended Learning Solution

VVA selected Pearson’s GradPoint™, a digital solution, as its curriculum. GradPoint offers a variety of core, elective, and AP® courses and is extremely flexible. “Our teachers can customize the courses for individual students, putting in modifications and accommodations along with the general requirements,” explained Vanessa Karwan, principal of VVA.

VVA high school students take one GradPoint course at a time, completing a course in approximately three weeks. “They can get success early on, as opposed to in a comprehensive high school where they have five classes in one day or a credit-recovery model where they have six classes a day,” explained Karwan.

In the blended learning model, high school students do their coursework at home or in school if they want small-group or one-on-one support. Attendance is flexible, based on individual students’ needs, but all students come to school at least once a week for individual instruction and weekly for literacy and math labs, as well as science wet labs.

“We have two girls who are coming in for accelerated courses,” Karwan said. “Those girls are very motivated to do their work outside of school. So they come in twice a week, they do their labs, they do their check-in with their teachers, and get any additional support that they need. Then we have kids who need more time here or kids who are falling behind, and we require them to come every day.”

Since GradPoint includes middle school as well as high school courses, VVA decided to continue using the online curriculum when it expanded to include grades 6 through 8. It began assigning one course every three weeks, but soon found that the pace was too fast for younger students. So now middle school students take math, a college readiness program called Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID), and physical education throughout the year. They rotate through English, social studies, and science courses each semester, focusing on the Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts (ELA) and Literacy.

PROFILE

City/State

Moreno Valley, California

School Type

Public

School Enrollment

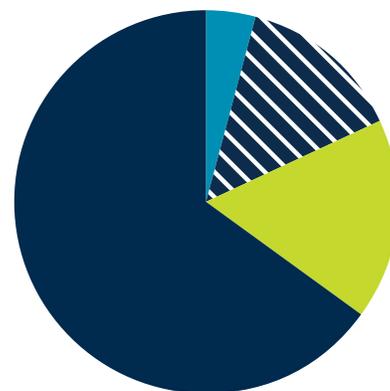
114 students

Grades

3–12

Ethnicity

- 65% Hispanic
- 17% African American
- 14% Caucasian
- 4% Asian/Pacific Islander



A blended learning model is also used in middle school, but teachers are much more hands-on. Karwan explained, “Middle school students work more in a lab-type setting, getting small-group and guided instruction. If a teacher sees them struggling in GradPoint, he’ll pull the lesson and create his own lesson with a Gradual Release of Responsibility Model.”

VVA uses a similar approach for elementary school students, supplementing an online curriculum for younger grades with direct and guided hands-on instruction.

The Results

VVA is pleased with how its students are performing, especially in ELA. In 2015, 76.6 percent of 11th-grade students met or exceeded standards on the California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress (CAASPP) ELA test. Karwan believes that GradPoint’s curriculum, as well as a concerted effort across all grades to improve notetaking and summarization skills, contributed to student success.

Student performance in math has trailed that of ELA but Karwan is optimistic that scores will improve. She is investing in additional professional development for math teachers and is implementing math interventions three times a week for struggling students.

Although the school is relatively new, VVA is seeing an increase in its graduation rate. The graduation rate for the school’s first graduating class in 2012–2013 was 78.6 percent. In 2013–2014, the graduation rate grew to 86.1 percent, which was five points higher than the graduation rate for the state of California (see Figure 1).

“We love GradPoint because it allows our teachers to customize the courses for personalized learning.”

— Vanessa Karwan, Principal

FIGURE 1

2013–2014 Cohort Graduation Rate



VVA graduates are also performing well. According to a recent survey, 86 percent of graduates are attending a two- or four-year college or are in the military. Of the eighteen 2014 graduates who enrolled in college last year, 100 percent are continuing on to their second year.

Student feedback about VVA and GradPoint has been positive. A student who plans to attend college and become a pastor said the blended learning program is helping him make up classes that he failed. "I like how you are able to get ahead and how I'm able to retake quizzes and tests that I didn't pass," he noted.

An aspiring chef agrees that VVA's blended learning approach helps students progress toward their goals. "It gives me time to focus and study for my career," she explained. "GradPoint provides many tools to help me study at home. The glossary tab helps me find definitions very quickly, and the announcement tab keeps me updated about school and news."

Karwan remarked, "Students like all the visuals. The text features are really great for the kids, and GradPoint is user-friendly." Given students' positive feedback and success, she is looking to increase the school's enrollment. VVA has already expanded to support over 120 at-risk students throughout the Val Verde Unified School District so they can recover the credits they need to stay on track to graduate. VVA also offers concurrent enrollment and original credit support to high school honor students in the district who are unable to fit all the courses they would like to take into their regular schedules.

“GradPoint is an excellent way to work at your own pace.”

— Student and Aspiring Chef



For more information about how blended learning programs can help your students succeed, visit pearsoned.com/k12-online-and-blended-learning

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makes
us**

Learning is a journey of discovery, challenge, and wonder. Along the way, we are transformed.