

Digital Content Case Study: Vail School District, AZ

DISTRICT PROFILE

Located in southeastern Tucson, Vail School District (VSD) is ranked the top largest school district in Arizona with over 10,000 students enrolled in grades K-12. The district's region has experienced immense residential and commercial growth over the past decade, leading the district to expand rapidly with new schools and alternative education options.

VSD states that they are "careful to continuously scrutinize what is best for students and families in light of the ever-changing cultural and generational paradigm." Since technology has infiltrated the lives of families across the country, VSD strives to ensure that students are given the technology tools and skills they need to be successful in the larger global community.

BEYOND TEXTBOOKS

Vail School District made news in 2005 with the opening of Empire High, hailed by many as the nation's first textbook-free high school. Committed to one-to-one learning, the school's planners needed to find money for student laptops and one place they looked was at the textbook budget. Textbooks for the four-year program would have cost

about \$500 per student, according to Vail School District CIO Matt Federoff. Instead of buying the textbooks, the district opted to use that money for hardware — and to design a digital curriculum that eventually evolved into a district-wide initiative known as "Beyond Textbooks".

Beyond Textbooks involves an extensive database built around state standards with formative assessments linked to each one. "What we used to do," explains Federoff, "is to take existing materials and try to shoehorn them into state standards. Now we're starting with the standards, and looking at the best ways to teach each of them. We call this 'inverting the curriculum.'"

"No vendor can provide it all," Federoff explained to the editors of K12 Computing Blueprint. "Think iTunes: we don't buy albums, we buy songs. I want the Civil War from one vendor, but I want WWII from another... the best bits and pieces from multiple sources that most closely match our instructional goals."

While Beyond Textbooks contains some premium content from subscription services such as Discovery Education Streaming, ABC-CLIO and BrainPOP,



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by far the largest component of the database is a vast variety of free content and teacher-created materials, as well as comments from other teachers about what they liked about a particular lesson or how they've altered or built upon it to make it better. "We don't expect to get everything for free," says Federoff, "but we're only going to pay for those specific materials our teachers have identified as being truly worthwhile".

ONLINE LEARNING

In 2011, Vail SD took their digital curriculum one step further. After originally forming a partnership with a neighboring district and using their online content and teachers, VSD wanted to redesign its online programs. In an effort to increase academic achievement, administrative buy-in, teacher support, and student engagement, VSD decided to build its own online program and made Education2020 (e2020) the foundation of its curriculum.

VSD decided to implement e2020 courses in a number of ways. At the Vail Blended Learning Center (VBL), approximately 60 students in grades 6-8 voluntarily enrolled in e2020 courses for their core curriculum instruction, which they access both at school and at home. Today, VBL

serves students in grades 6-8 with online content developed by k12 Inc., e2020, and VBL on-campus enrichment activities and instruction.

The district also created the Vail Digital Learning Program (VDLP), a fully online virtual academy for grades 6-12, serving approximately 85 students. The district reports that students who participate in the VDLP are motivated to attend for a number of factors: home schooling, physical and emotional issues, commitments to sports team travel, and various other academic and personal circumstances. Additionally, at each VSD high school, students can take the online courses in the school's computer lab as part of a blended learning credit recovery program.

According to a report by Education 2020, the online courses offered by VSD support the needs of all students with engaging instruction from a certified, on-screen teacher; rigorous content, assignments, and embedded tasks; and a number of learning scaffolds, such as a translator, graphic organizer, highlighter, and more. Students have the flexibility to catch up on content or courses they have missed, enroll in courses the district might not offer, and take advanced courses to get ahead academically or to graduate early. "I have seen a significant jump in students completing classes, staying in the program, and



going on to finish their high school degrees,” confirms Online Coordinator John Roberts.

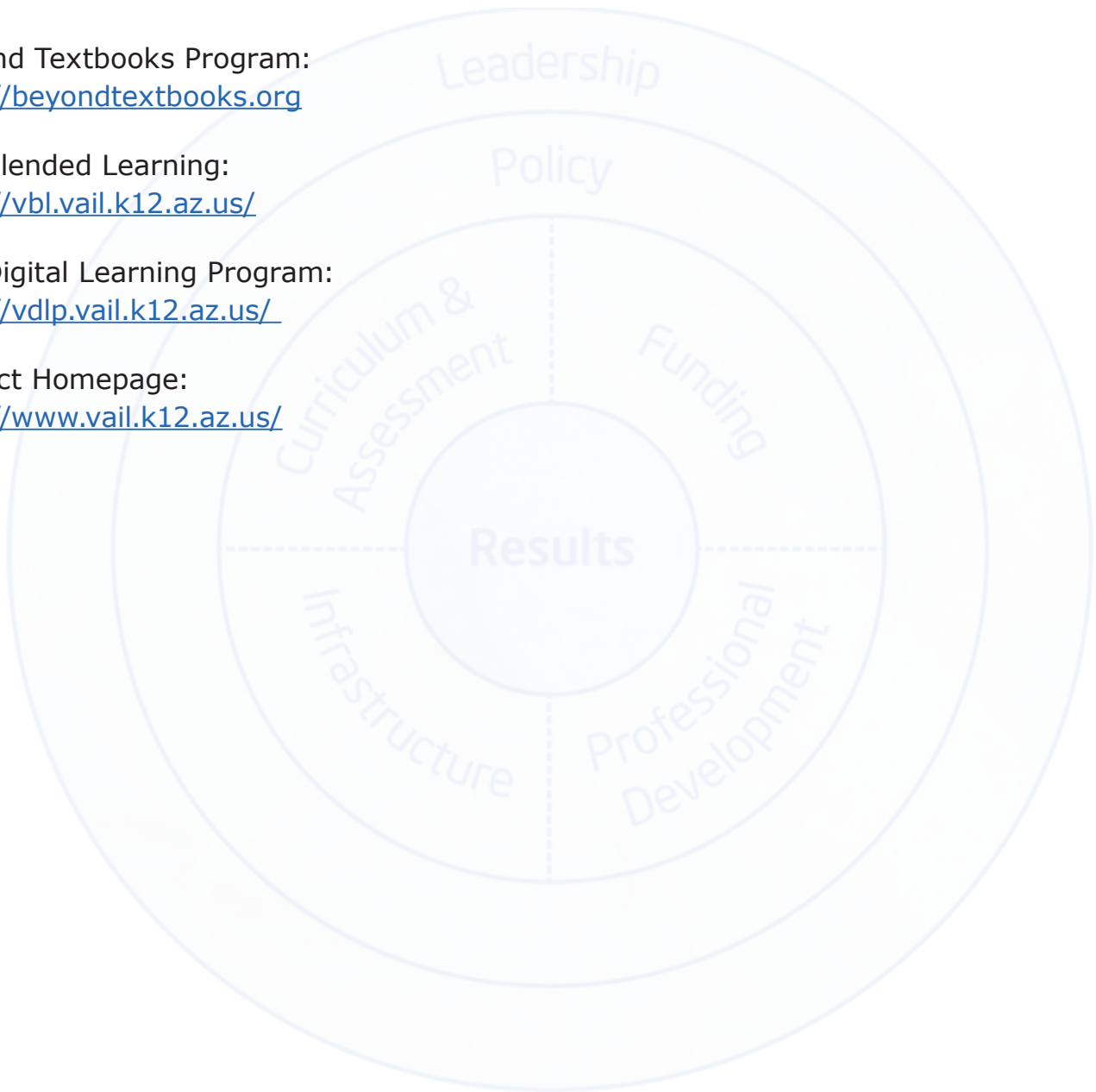
FOR MORE INFORMATION

Beyond Textbooks Program:
<http://beyondtextbooks.org>

Vail Blended Learning:
<http://vbl.vail.k12.az.us/>

Vail Digital Learning Program:
<http://vdlp.vail.k12.az.us/>

District Homepage:
<http://www.vail.k12.az.us/>



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