



# **APEX LEARNING IMPLEMENTATION CASE STUDY – EVANSVILLE VANDERBURGH SCHOOL CORPORATION**

Prepared for Apex Learning, Inc.

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# INTRODUCTION

In late 2020, Apex Learning, Inc. (Apex) partnered with Hanover Research (Hanover) to begin a mixed-methods product implementation evaluation. The multi-analysis evaluation aimed to explore district experiences implementing and using Apex products and services within the district-wide virtual and hybrid learning environments that resulted from the global pandemic between spring 2020 and fall 2021. This case study report summarizes key findings and potential action items from an analysis of the data provided by Evansville Vanderburgh School Corporation (EVSC). To frame these themes, the sections present a complete picture of the common experiences educators and administrators have with Apex products and services through a four-phase lifecycle (i.e., adoption and planning, onboarding and getting started, implementation, and outcomes).

# METHODOLOGY

Hanover conducted a survey, focus groups, and in-depth interviews to collect and evaluate stakeholders' experiences implementing and using Apex products and services. Details of each endeavor appear in Figure ES 1. *Note: All content presented in this case study report was commissioned by Apex and completed by Hanover Research.*

**Figure ES 1: Summary of Research Projects**

PROJECT	RESEARCH QUESTIONS	SAMPLE
 <p><b>Survey Administration and Dashboard</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ To what extent have Apex products and services helped (or hindered) the district in achieving virtual and hybrid instructional program goals?               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ To what extent did using Apex improve virtual and hybrid instructional program outcomes?</li> <li>○ To what extent did Apex products engage students and/or improve student outcomes?</li> </ul> </li> <li>▪ To what extent did district technology administrators find success integrating Apex products and services into existing district networks?</li> <li>▪ What factors prompted the district to incorporate Apex products and services into the virtual and hybrid program?</li> <li>▪ To what extent did classroom instructional staff feel prepared to implement Apex products and services for virtual and hybrid instructional programs after completing training or professional development?</li> </ul>	<p>71 school and district staff members, 90 percent of whom used Apex for direct instruction with students</p>
 <p><b>In-Depth Interviews and Analysis</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ How have Apex products and services helped (or hindered) district administrators achieve virtual and hybrid instructional program goals?</li> <li>▪ What are district administrators' perceptions of the effectiveness of Apex products and services for virtual and hybrid instruction?</li> </ul>	<p>Academic administrators</p>
 <p><b>Focus Group Sessions and Analysis*</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ How have Apex products and services helped (or hindered) teachers achieve virtual and hybrid instructional program goals?</li> <li>▪ What are teachers' perceptions of the effectiveness of Apex products and services for virtual and hybrid instruction?</li> <li>▪ To what extent did Apex products and services engage students and/or improve academic outcomes?</li> </ul>	<p>Focus group comprised of staff members.</p>

# CASE STUDY: STAKEHOLDER PERCEPTIONS AND EXPERIENCES WITH APEX LEARNING IN EVANSVILLE VANDERBURGH SCHOOL CORPORATION

In this section, Hanover synthesizes the most salient findings in order of implementation lifecycle phase (i.e., adoption and planning, onboarding and getting started, implementation, outcomes).

## ADOPTION AND PLANNING



Insights presented in the in-depth interviews, focus group conversations, and survey responses indicate that EVSC chose Apex in response to COVID-19 because of their long-standing use of the platform at their virtual school before the pandemic and the subsequent need for a readymade curriculum. Unlike many districts, EVSC had extensive experience with online learning and chose to maximize the use of their online virtual academy, assigning over 3700 virtual students to the campus at the peak of pandemic operations.

In searching for a digital curriculum provider, particularly following the onset of COVID-19, EVSC wanted to ensure continuity of instruction by expanding their use of Apex to grades 6-12. The district and its decision-makers were familiar with set-up, account creation, and user requirements at their virtual academy. They had been pleased with Apex curriculum sequencing and alignment.

*"We've actually been a virtual school for 11 years now and we have always used Apex from the beginning with our high school students. We had an extensive amount of very quick growth due to the pandemic. And so because of that, we also included our sixth, seventh, and eighth-graders in our Apex classrooms. With the pandemic, we were 100% virtual."*

- EVSC Interview Participant

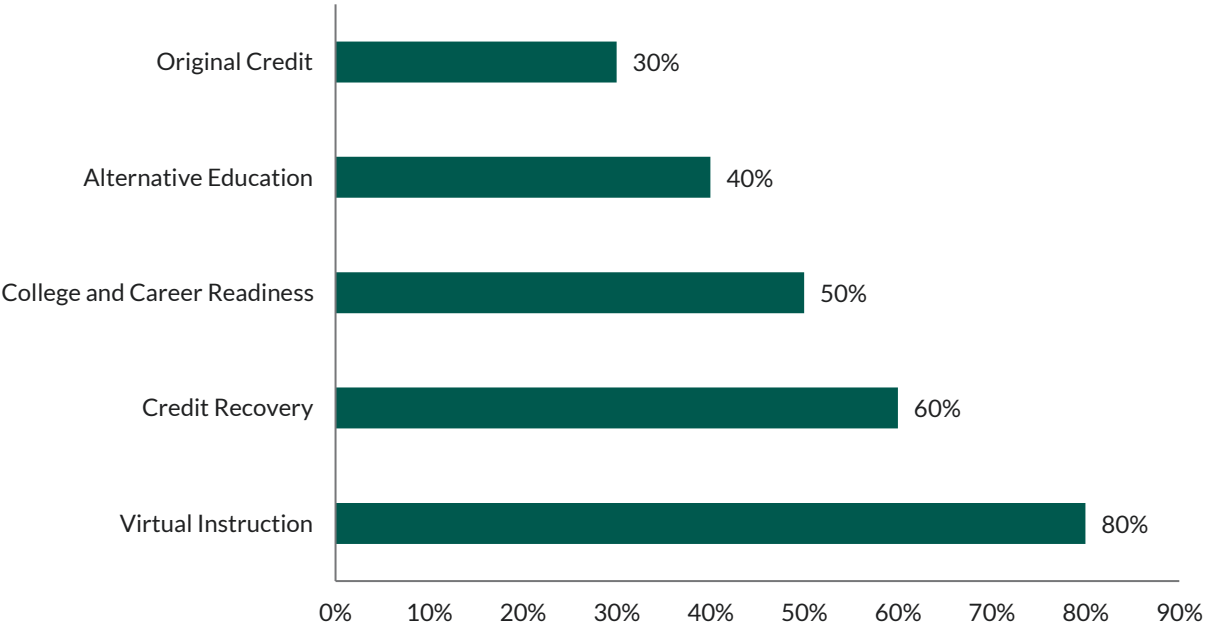
The district noted how easy Apex products were to incorporate quickly, and the district found that their familiarity with Apex made expanding their use of its products and services an easy decision, even though they were effectively adopting a completely new platform for their middle grades. This familiarity also enabled staff who were comfortable with the platform to help teachers with Apex tools.

*"We had an extensive amount of very quick growth due to the pandemic...we went from 86 students in May of last year, [and] we ended this year with 1,750. [...] Because we were growing so quickly, we wanted to go with the product that we knew how to use, we knew how to navigate it, rather than trying to train more teachers on a platform that we weren't familiar with."*

- EVSC Interview Participant

When asked why the district chose Apex, survey participants indicated several factors that contributed to the selection of Apex Learning Curriculum. Figure 1.1 illustrates the district needs that were most important in their decision. Apex’s ability to meet these needs strongly influenced the district’s decision to choose Apex.

**Figure 1.1: District Needs Most Important to Support**

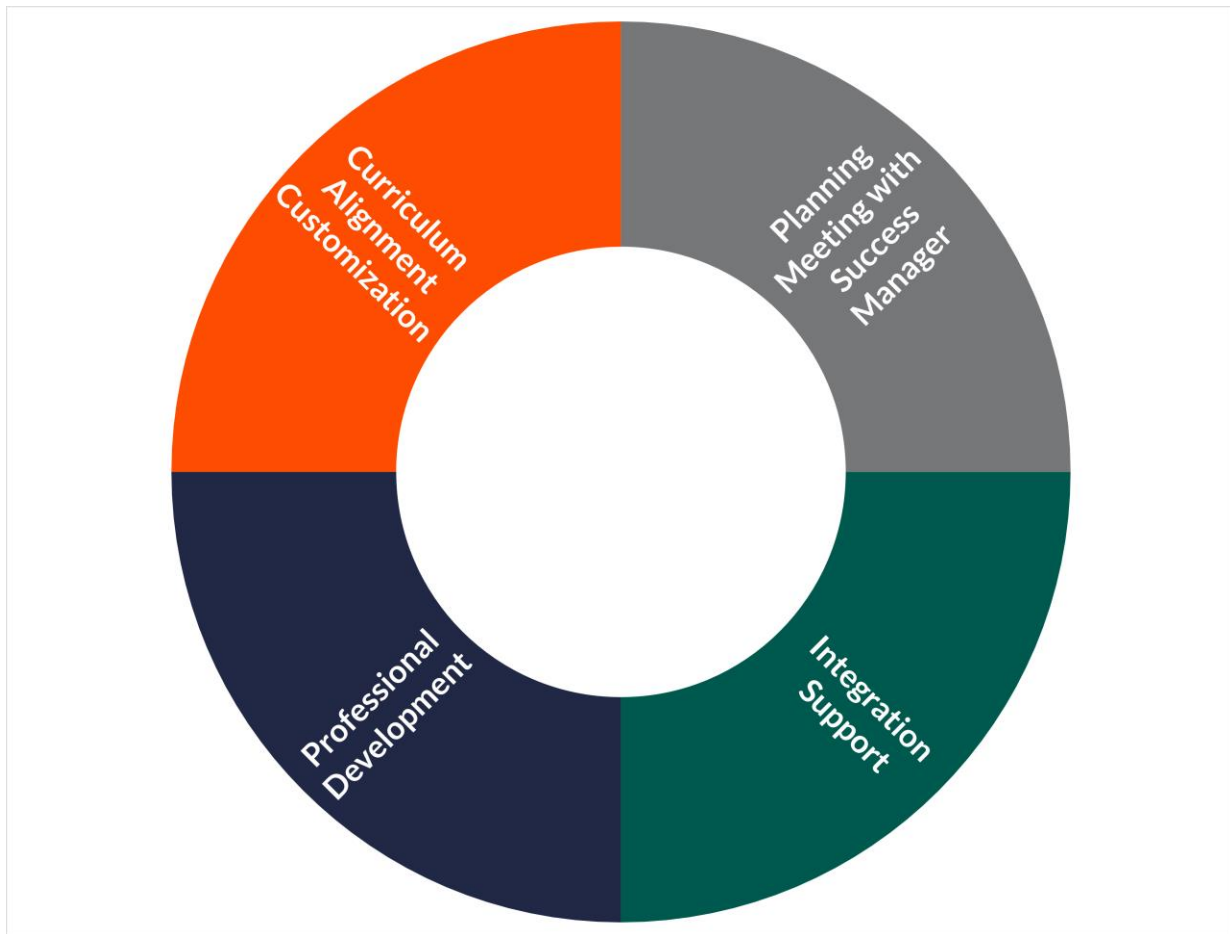


*“We’ve always been very, very pleased with our 9 through 12 curriculum and the way it coincides with our state standards and our curriculum guides at our district level.”*

- EVSC Interview Participant

As the district moved from adopting (i.e., identifying Apex as their digital curriculum provider) to planning (i.e., initially establishing Apex products and services as a part of programs), the **district found a variety of Apex-provided support services helpful, including Planning Meetings and Curriculum Alignment Customization**, as noted in Figure 1.2.

Figure 1.2: Apex Services Identified as Helpful



Additionally, the district found that Apex tools were adjustable to fit their curricula and that the product was user-friendly upon initial implementation. Interviewed staff describe how Apex units and lessons did not follow the same sequence as their current curricula. However, teachers could modify units and sequences to fit their needs.

“One of my favorite things about the program is the ability to add and remove assignments and add customs. So, if there's something that just isn't a good fit, or it can't find a book, or something like that, we were able to modify the course.”

- EVSC Focus Group Participant

*"I think another important feature, and I think we're all kind of used to it, but it most certainly came in handy was the ability to remove or adjust the curriculum, one based on our COVID lives right now. But then we had those snow days, and we were able to go in and kind of make some adjustments there. That was very, very helpful."*

- EVSC Focus Group Participant

## ONBOARDING AND GETTING STARTED



**EVSC made the decision to move online students to its virtual academy as needed. As the number of students grew, so did the requirement for teachers at the campus.** The district created courses for and conducted training with every new teacher. They customized courses to fit teacher needs. Teachers added custom activities and ensured the courses were designed to meet student needs and state requirements.

**EVSC teachers and district personnel highlight successful strategies for integrating Apex and how helpful the Apex technical support team was.** Specifically, the Support Coordinator and help desk at Apex were noted for their exceptional service, and 100% of survey respondents indicated that conferencing sessions with Success Managers were extremely helpful. Almost all teachers (98%) in the district felt prepared to implement Apex Learning curriculum after completing Apex and/or district-provided training or professional development.

*"The Apex staff were very good to work with. They were really, really helpful. I cannot say enough nice things about the helpdesk people. They are phenomenal. They're always so nice. And they're wonderful, and I can't say enough nice things about working with them. We are continually kind of making sure everything is on track, we've been really pleased with Apex's response when we run into trouble."*

- EVSC Interview Participant

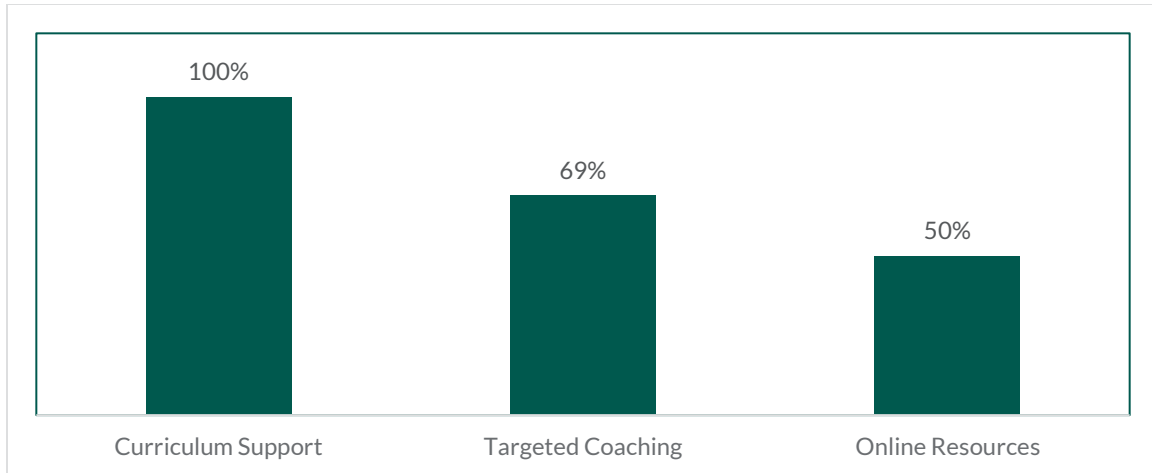
EVSC teachers planned assigned work in Apex using the district's learning management software for all of their virtual students and worked to ensure both in-person and virtual students followed similar sequencing.

*"I began to appreciate because everything was there, the study guides, the quizzes, the test, if a student logged in, if they didn't log in. We were able to provide help sessions. There was so much in Apex. So, I think for a brand new teacher, that is the most important thing. In fact, I think we're going to have an Apex training next week sometime, and I'm going to go back to the training because once you get in, it's the volume of resources that are wonderful. After I got in and I began to understand, the program is a wealth of knowledge."*

- EVSC Focus Group Participant

Overall, EVSC survey participants believed the supports provided by Apex to be helpful. Figure 1.3 identifies Apex provided learning supports and professional development that respondents said were very or extremely helpful.

**Figure 1.3: Helpfulness of Apex Learning Supports**



## IMPLEMENTATION



**EVSC dealt with a rapidly increasing influx of students to its virtual academy as a result of COVID-19.** District staff and teachers had to work hard to keep up with the demand for online curriculum. Because of their extensive experience with Apex before the pandemic, EVSC completed most of its implementation training in-house and utilized Apex-provided tutorials.

**COVID-19 caused the district to transition from using Apex for credit recovery to expanding use to support hybrid and general education virtual learning.** Figure 1.4 presents the division of the district's remote and at-school Apex curriculum uses.

**Figure 1.4: Implementation of the Apex Curriculum According to Learning Environment**

CURRICULUM USE		REMOTE STUDENTS	ON-CAMPUS STUDENTS
Curriculum	Core curriculum	96%	77%
	Supplemental curriculum	4%	23%
Instruction	All instruction	86%	77%
	Supplemental instruction	14%	23%
Instruction time	Over the full school year	81%	82%
	During a targeted period of time	19%	18%
Learning	Synchronous	28%	67%
	Asynchronous	72%	33%
Scope	Accessing full scope and sequence	80%	55%
	Accessing partial scope and sequence	20%	45%



*“Our district ended up hiring someone whose full-time job it was to provide Apex support for our students and our faculty. And so she was trained on Apex and then was able to work with students when they ran into technical issues about submitting work or logging in or that sort of thing, then we actually had a dedicated person to do that.”*

- EVSC Interview Participant

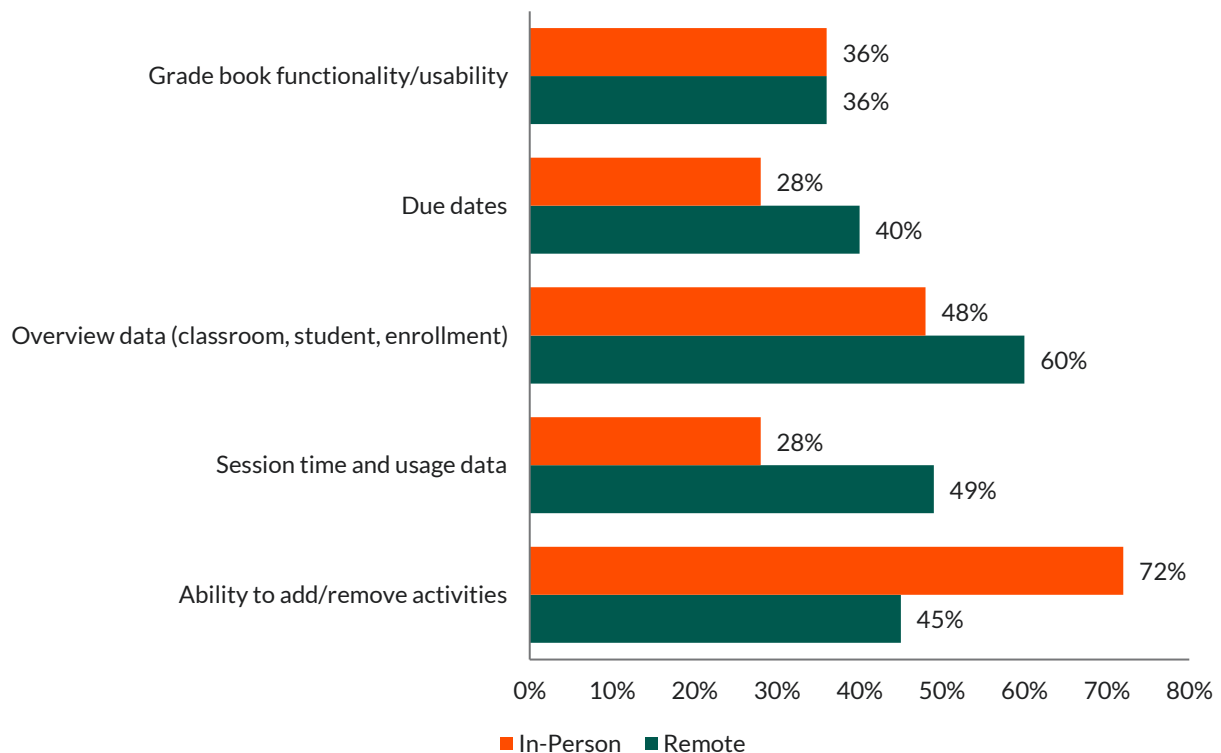
**EVSC leaders praised the Apex supports and curriculum, which allowed EVSC to safely meet the needs of its students.**

*“We learned a lot about the program itself and how to more effectively implement it from our side. But I think our biggest success is [having] most credits that we had awarded for our high school students, and then just the option of allowing students to attend school safely for the year.”*

- EVSC Interview Participant

Additionally, survey responses demonstrate several additional helpful Apex features, whether students followed a remote or in-person learning model. Figure 1.5 contains the top five features for instruction within each learning environment.

**Figure 1.5: Most Helpful Apex Product Features for In-Person and Remote Instruction**



“Of course, the progress reports are excellent. You could just print them out. You can just print them out by clicking a student's name, which is very helpful. Then I also love the time on report. It's my favorite feature.”

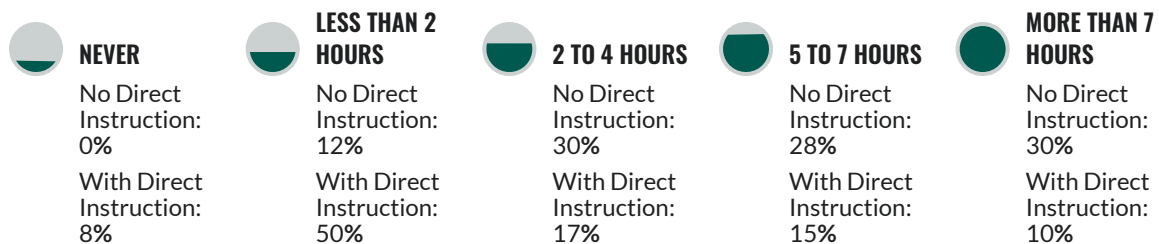
- EVSC Focus Group Participant

“[Apex] will actually read the content to the students and it helps a lot. It really did. And if you have a student who's reading level's really low and they can't, then it's going to read the information for them and prompt them along. That's just one thing I liked about it.

- EVSC Focus Group Participant

EVSC teachers utilized the Apex platform to help them manage oversized student loads and increased accommodation and differentiation. Teachers typically needed to provide consistent and active progress monitoring to keep students engaged, which Apex supported through a variety of resources. As illustrated in Figure 1.6, students used Apex curriculum materials as a primary mode of instruction, and Apex was a more significant part of students' days when teachers were not present to provide direct instruction. Students were able to work independently and be successful using Apex.

Figure 1.6: Amount of Time Spent Using Apex Curriculum in a Single Course in a Typical Week



Apex increased the capability of EVSC teachers to keep students engaged when providing direct instruction. According to survey results, only 38% of students were engaged without direct teacher instruction. In contrast, 64% of students were engaged when using the Apex platform with direct teacher instruction. Figure 1.7 illustrates these differences in engagement.

**Figure 1.7: Student Engagement With and Without Direct Teacher Instruction**

	COMPLETELY OR SOMEWHAT DISENGAGED	NEUTRAL	COMPLETELY OR SOMEWHAT ENGAGED
Students using the Apex curriculum independently <b>without direct teacher instruction</b>	42%	19%	38%
Students using the Apex curriculum <b>with direct teacher instruction</b>	20%	16%	64%

Survey results and focus group responses clearly demonstrate that **teacher interaction is a key component of student engagement, with or without Apex**. Teachers being present to start lessons, explain concepts, and guide student navigation of the digital curriculum results in greater student engagement and learning.

*“Our completion rate was very good as far as our students completing the courses, so that would be a huge success. We were able to, I mean, essentially just provide a safe option for students to go to school in the middle of a pandemic which was huge.”*

- EVSC Interview Participant

While Apex users faced challenges with virtual learning and benefitted from modifying their practices to align with the Apex tools, focus group participants emphasized aspects of the product that they and their students got excited to use (e.g., engaging texts and supplemental videos).

*“Since I had 511 kids starting out, it was impossible for me to meet one-on-one. So, what I found myself doing was using my videos that I had created elsewhere and sending those to the kids. I was supplementing [Apex].”*

- EVSC Focus Group Participant

*“I do appreciate is I like how the program is holistic in English, for example. It's not just reading; it's not just grammar. You provide historical content in which the stories were written, which is important in English, because we reflect the times from which we come. It also gives essays from different people on the subject. And the videos are good in English.”*

- EVSC Focus Group Participant

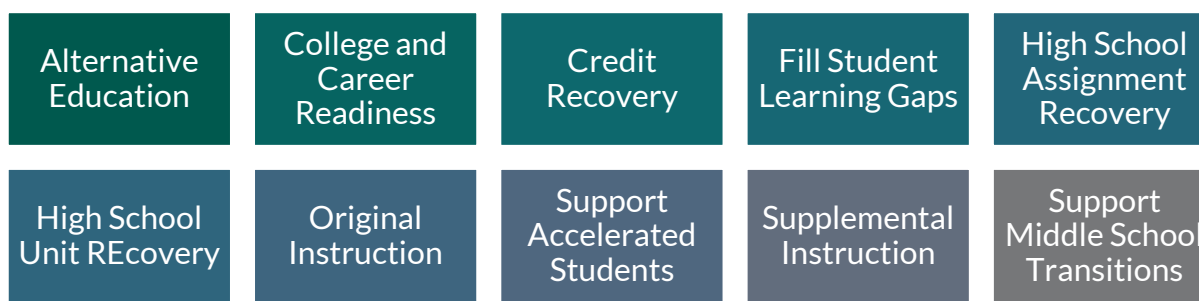
## OUTCOMES



Despite COVID-19's impact on the learning environment, Apex allowed EVSC teachers to employ a wide range of options to engage students and ensure their ultimate success regardless of whether the student was in-person or virtual. Tools within the Apex platform also enabled EVSC teachers to address the difficult challenge of assessing students, and 86% of district teachers were somewhat or completely satisfied with the support they received from Apex to evaluate student outcomes and/or program success.

EVSC district, school, and classroom staff felt satisfied with Apex's ability to support students needing to learn under a particularly challenging and irregular instructional climate. Focus group participants agree that Apex is exceptionally rigorous and pushes students to be successful in multiple contexts. Figure 1.8 highlights some areas where survey respondents saw positive impacts with their students.

Figure 1.8: Contexts in which Apex has had a Somewhat or Very Positive Impact, Teacher Responses



*"I think our biggest success is [having] most credits that we had awarded for our high school students, and then just the option of allowing students to attend school safely for the year."*

- EVSC Interview Participant

*"I have found Apex to be just perfect. I like the data. It is just remarkable. The reading material, everything in on level, stay the line. I just find it very remarkable. It is very important to show them, 'Hey look, you're going to learn about this. You're going to learn about this. It is this long and that short.'*

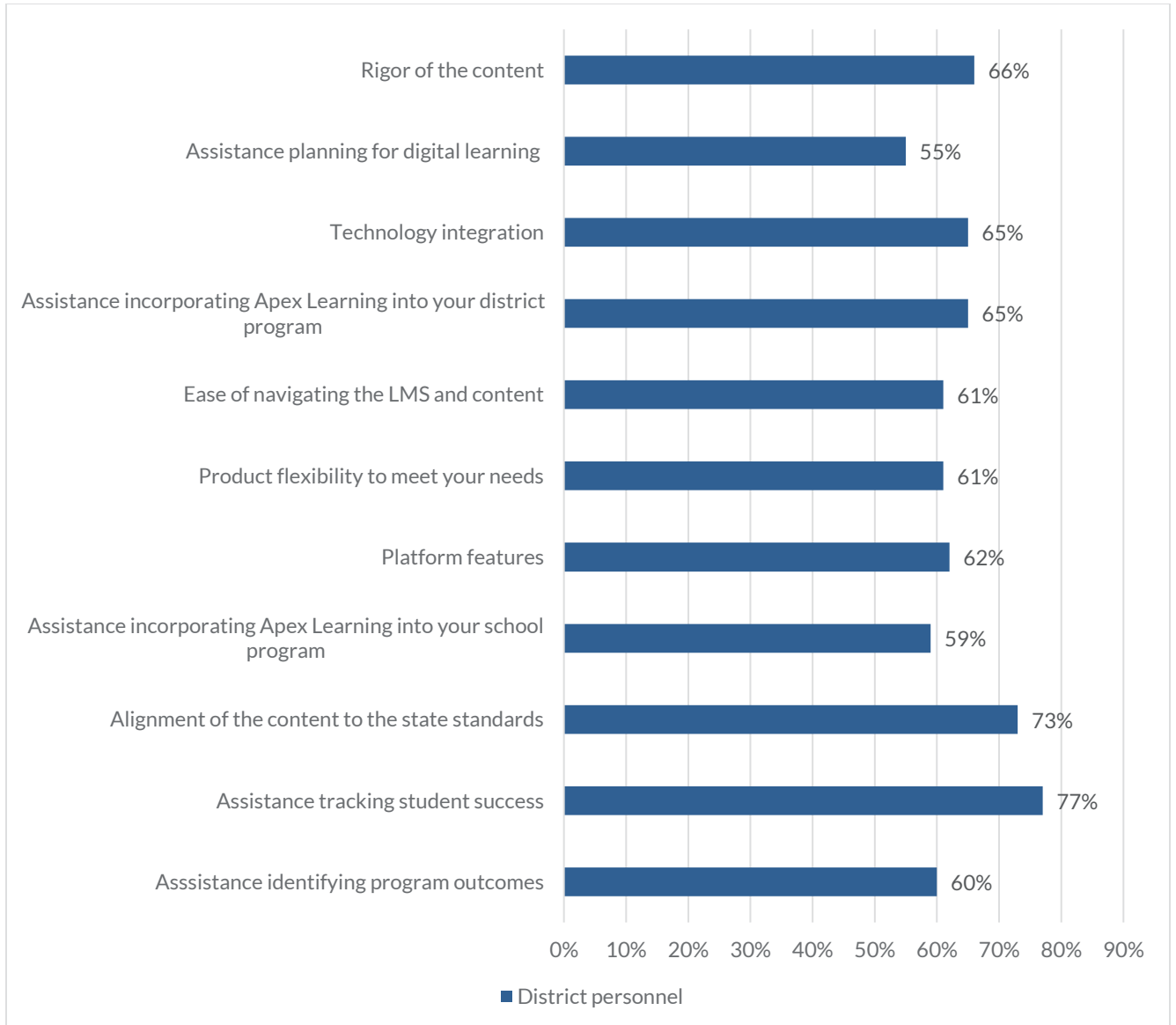
*And they would say, 'Okay, I can do this.'*

*And we can do it together. But as I said, I have found Apex to be just ideal. The videos are just wonderful. As I say, I like the print with Apex, and I love the diversity that you have there. Students today are just not seeing one group of people. They can see themselves in the videos. I enjoy that. And then a big thing is, I'm able to edit here and there, just as was mentioned at the very beginning of our discussion about being able to change things around. So, I am just thrilled with Apex. I really am."*

-EVSC Focus Group Participant

Echoing the qualitative responses regarding Apex success, 63% of EVSC survey respondents found Apex had a positive impact on program outcomes. Figure 1.9 illustrates the percentage of personnel somewhat or completely satisfied with different aspects of Apex.

**Figure 1.9: Aspects of Apex with which District Staff are Somewhat or Completely Satisfied**



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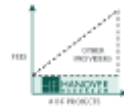
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