APEX LEARNING IMPLEMENTATION CASE STUDY – FRENSHIP INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT

Prepared for Apex Learning, Inc.

December 2021

TABLE OF CONTENTS

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 Frenship Independent School District (FISD). 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

Survey Administration and Dashboard	▪ To what extent have Apex products and services helped (or hindered) the district in achieving virtual and hybrid instructional program goals?
	   o To what extent did using Apex improve virtual and hybrid instructional program outcomes?
	   o To what extent did Apex products engage students and/or improve student outcomes?
	 ▪ To what extent did district technology administrators find success integrating Apex products and services into existing district networks?
	 ▪ What factors prompted the district to incorporate Apex products and services into the virtual and hybrid program?
	 ▪ 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?
		58 school and district staff members, 90 percent of whom used Apex for direct instruction with students

In-Depth Interviews and Analysis	▪ How have Apex products and services helped (or hindered) district administrators achieve virtual and hybrid instructional program goals? ▪ What are district administrators' perceptions of the effectiveness of Apex products and services for virtual and hybrid instruction?	Technology and academic administrators
Focus Group Sessions and Analysis*	▪ How have Apex products and services helped (or hindered) teachers achieve virtual and hybrid instructional program goals? ▪ What are teachers' perceptions of the effectiveness of Apex products and services for virtual and hybrid instruction? ▪ To what extent did Apex products and services engage students and/or improve academic outcomes?	Focus group comprised of staff members.

CASE STUDY: STAKEHOLDER PERCEPTIONS AND EXPERIENCES WITH APEX LEARNING IN FRENSHIP INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT

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 FISD chose Apex in response to COVID-19 since many teachers already knew how to use the system and how to support students and receive support from Apex's customer services. FISD prioritized the ability to adjust Apex course content to mirror the district scope and sequences to better support students who were transitioning from virtual to in-person learning throughout the year.

In searching for a digital curriculum provider, particularly following the onset of COVID-19, FISD wanted a program that offered virtual instruction and credit recovery tools that were easy to use. The district and its decision-makers were familiar with set-up, account creation, and user requirements.

> *"If a student was virtual and on Apex the first grading period and then came back face-to-face the second grading period, [their transition] was seamless. And they were on pace with their peers in the brick and mortar building."*
>
> - Frenship 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 easier than adopting a completely new platform. This familiarity also enabled staff who were comfortable with the platform to mentor students new to Apex tools.

> *"[Apex] fit very well. It was easy, and they aligned very well with what we were doing."*
>
> - Frenship Interview Participant

When asked a similar question on why the district chose Apex, survey participants indicated an equal split on the factors that contributed to the selection of Apex Learning Curriculum. As illustrated in Figure 1.1, Apex's alignment with standards, product design, and product features all strongly influenced the district's decision to choose Apex.

Figure 1.1: Factors Contributing to Frenship Independent School District Choosing Apex

Factor	Percentage
Alignment with Standards	33%
Product features (e.g., ability to customize content, mastery-based learning, progress monitoring)	33%
Product design	33%
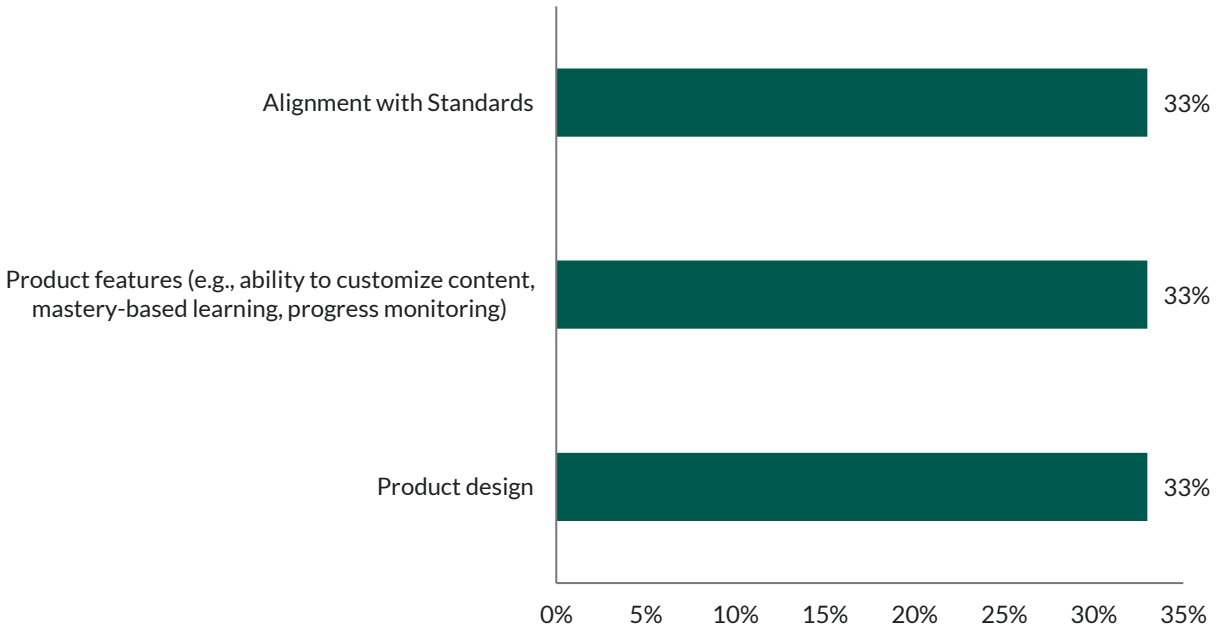
"Teachers love Apex - how easy it was to work through."

- Frenship 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 used Apex-provided professional development services most often and found the Integration Support and Curriculum Alignment Customization** very helpful. All respondents found these services very or extremely helpful, as noted in Figure 1.2.

Figure 1.2: Apex Services Identified as Very or Extremely Helpful

Service	Percentage
Integration Support	67%
Planning Meeting with Success Manager	100%
Curriculum Alignment Customization	75%

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 had the ability to modify units and sequences to fit their needs. One district member noted that rearranging the scope and sequence within Apex also modified the associated assessment, which was extremely helpful.

> *"With all [the students] moving back and forth, we had to make sure that the Apex scope and sequence matched our district scope and sequence that they were using in face-to-face instruction. So, it was an easy transition to go, oh yeah, this works. It's been effective, and we can just use it again now in this new context with virtual learners."*
>
> -Frenship Interview Participant

ONBOARDING AND GETTING STARTED

When schools closed in March 2020, FISD moved all of its courses online to Apex. The district created courses for and conducted training with every single teacher. They customized courses to fit teacher needs, and the result was that every teacher and student were prepared to use Apex in the hybrid environment of the 2020-21 school year.

Despite certain challenges integrating Apex with existing technology (e.g., teachers new to the platform adjusting to the tools, integrating technology with existing management systems and grade books), FISD **highlights successful strategies for integrating Apex and how helpful the Apex technical support team was**. Specifically, the Support Coordinator from Apex was noted for her exceptional service, and 97% of survey respondents participated in conferencing sessions with Success Managers. Almost all teachers (99%) in the district felt prepared to implement Apex Learning curriculum after completing Apex and/or district-provided training or professional development.

> *"[The support coordinator] came in August and helped train our teachers on [the] Apex platform. And that is very intuitive. That was very user friendly."*
>
> -Frenship Interview Participant

FISD 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.

> *"My students just log in and do, with English, all the assignments, and then if they need help, they'll contact me through [our learning management software]."*
>
> -Frenship Interview Participant

> *"It was a game changer for us, the development, when we were able to integrate Apex into our Schoology Learning Management System."*
>
> - Frenship Interview Participant

Overall, FISD survey respondents believed the supports they received from Apex to be helpful. Figure 1.3 identifies the specific supports FISD staff identified as very or extremely helpful (100%).

Figure 1.3: Helpfulness of Apex Learning Supports
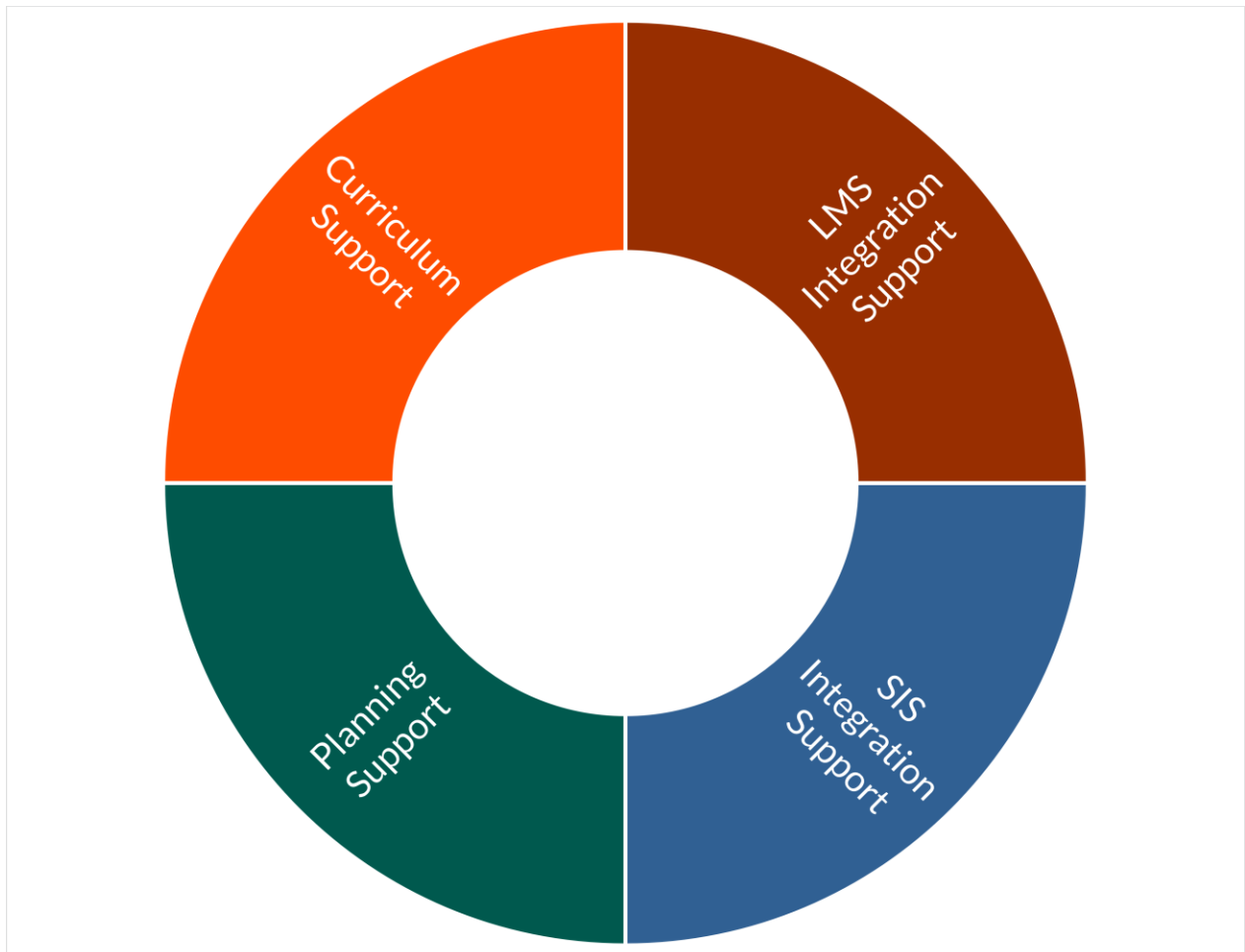
IMPLEMENTATION

Texas required districts to allow students to move between virtual and in-person learning, prompting teachers to creatively incorporate Apex into their teaching practices and modify program components to meet students' needs. FISD allowed students to transition between virtual and in-person at the beginning of each grading period, so the district worked to align the Apex scope and sequence with the district scope and sequence.

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	91%	80%
	Supplemental curriculum	9%	20%
Instruction	All instruction	88%	87%
	Supplemental instruction	12%	13%
Instruction time	Over the full school year	80%	73%
	During a targeted period of time	20%	27%
Learning	Synchronous	55%	38%
	Asynchronous	45%	62%
Scope	Accessing full scope and sequence	65%	73%
	Accessing partial scope and sequence	35%	27%

"Students settled into this new learning model. In the spring, we also started using the Apex Tutorials, especially as it got closer to state assessment season - just to help tailor and differentiate the instruction based on what the student's skill levels and needs were."

- Frenship Interview Participant

FISD leaders praised the Apex tutorials as a great diagnostic tool to identify student strengths and weaknesses. FISD teachers also highlighted the ease and advantages of retakes within the Apex curriculum.

"There are some things I like about the testing and the quiz. The fact that you can set multiple retakes, and the fact that they have set up multiple questions for each of the sections of that module. So, it's not exactly the same test every time. So, I think that's good."

- Frenship Focus Group Participant

"[We could] then tailor each student's work within those tutorials to prepare for that state assessment. Really helped us differentiate, just like what we would do in a face-to-face classroom, differentiate for them remotely."

- Frenship 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
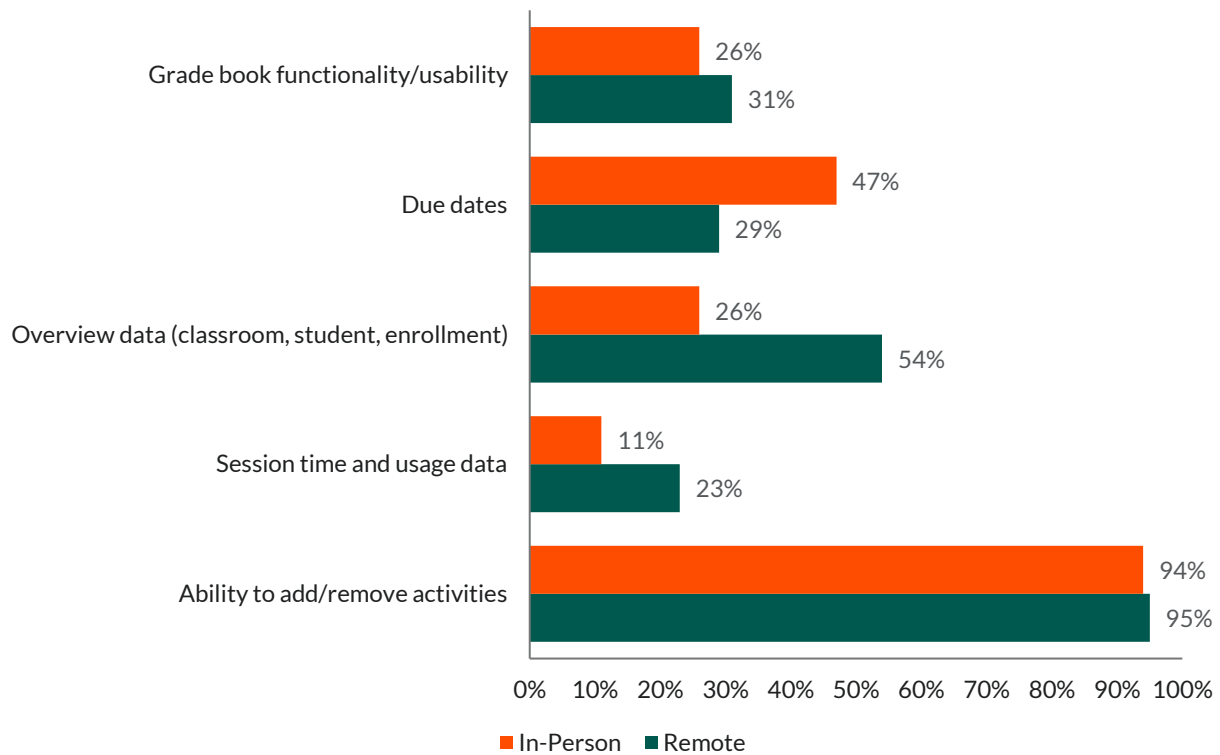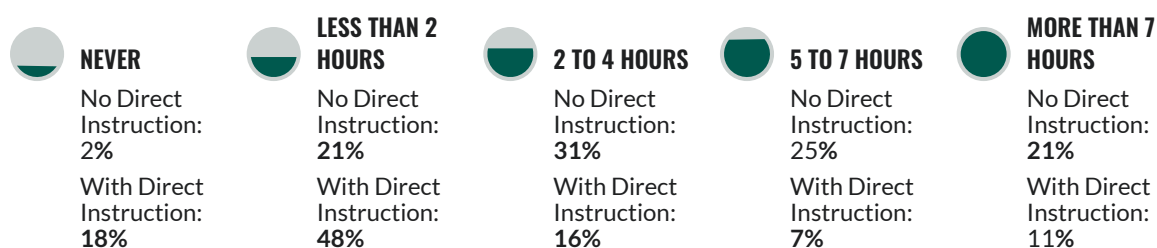

> "I think the main positive that I see is that if you've got multiple classes, it was easy for the kids to find all of their work, so to speak. If they were working solely in Apex, they would just log into one site, pick their class, do their assignments."
>
> - Frenship Focus Group Participant

Teachers agree that Apex—and virtual learning in general—is very effective among self-motivated, independent students. For other students, teachers typically needed to provide consistent and active progress monitoring to keep students engaged, which Apex supported through engaging videos and materials. As illustrated in Figure 1.6, most students spent four hours or less on Apex curriculum materials in a typical week for a single course both with and without direct teacher instruction, and Apex was a more significant part of students' days when teachers were not present to support learning.

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

NEVER

No Direct Instruction: 2%

With Direct Instruction: **18%**

LESS THAN 2 HOURS

No Direct Instruction: **21%**

With Direct Instruction: **48%**

2 TO 4 HOURS

No Direct Instruction: **31%**

With Direct Instruction: **16%**

5 TO 7 HOURS

No Direct Instruction: 25%

With Direct Instruction: **7%**

MORE THAN 7 HOURS

No Direct Instruction: **21%**

With Direct Instruction: 11%

During these Apex hours, teachers reported that students engaged more with teachers present. According to survey results, 40% of students were engaged without direct teacher instruction. In contrast, with teacher instruction, 66% of students appeared engaged. Figure 1.77 illustrates these differences in engagement.

Figure 1.7: Student Engagement With and Without Direct Teacher Instruction

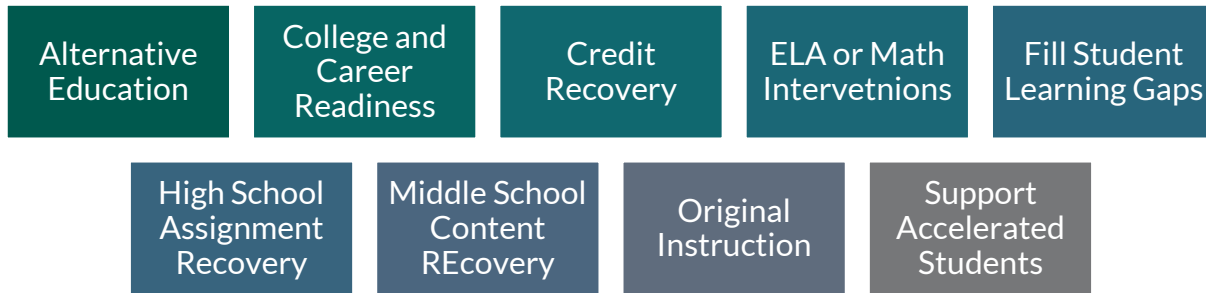|	COMPLETELY OR SOMEWHAT DISENGAGED	NEUTRAL	COMPLETELY OR SOMEWHAT ENGAGED
Students using the Apex curriculum independently **without direct teacher instruction**	32%	26%	41%
Students using the Apex curriculum **with direct teacher instruction**	14%	17%	69%

These results and focus group responses corroborate how **teacher guidance is a key component of student engagement, particularly with students in more challenging courses.** Teachers being present to get students started with lessons, explain concepts differently, and provide support between assessments resulted in greater student engagement and learning through digital curricula.

"I think there's a really good engaging in things in the English curriculum that students do enjoy. Sometimes they're always going to complain about it, but I think they do enjoy much of it."

- Frenship Focus Group 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). Figure 1.8 presents educational contexts noted in the survey results where teachers believe Apex positively impacted student outcomes.

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

Alternative Education	College and Career Readiness	Credit Recovery	ELA or Math Intervetnions	Fill Student Learning Gaps

High School Assignment Recovery	Middle School Content REcovery	Original Instruction	Support Accelerated Students

These perceptions align with qualitative responses. Using Apex for summer school, accelerated instruction, and unit or credit recovery instruction often resulted in comparatively strong outcomes.

> *"The Apex Tutorials are a great help. We'll be using them a lot next year for that accelerated instruction."*
>
> - Frenship Interview Participant

> *"Apex has a lot of interactive components to it, some little videos and interactive devices as they're learning the material, and the study guides are good."*
>
> - Frenship Focus Group Participant

OUTCOMES

Despite COVID-19's impact on learning environments, Apex allowed FISD teachers to employ various options to engage students and ensure their ultimate success. 82% of district teachers were somewhat or completely satisfied with the support they received from Apex to evaluate student outcomes and/or program success.

Ultimately, 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. Apex provided the virtual platform needed to support students during the quick transition between virtual and in-person learning. Even in a completely virtual environment, Apex helped districts achieve successful results.

> *"The Apex curriculum is at the correct rigor of what our expectations are."*
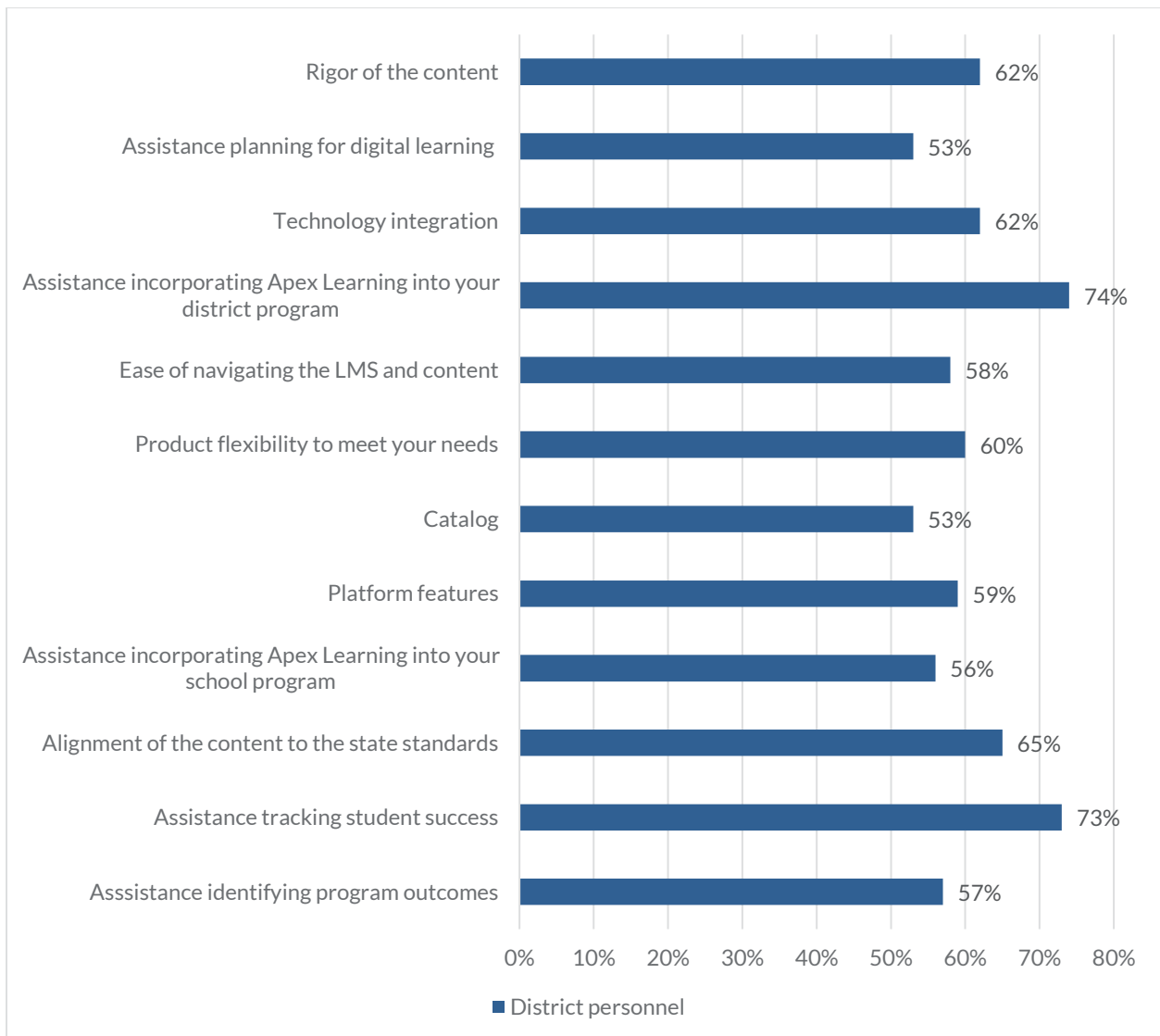>
> - Frenship Interview Participant

"When I pulled the data for our English 1 and our Algebra 1 state assessments and compared how our face-to-face students did versus our virtual, the English 1 students who were virtual performed at the exact same level as our face-to-face. Our virtual algebra students were maybe three percentage points lower than our face-to-face, but still very comparable when you think about how the nature of the Algebra 1 content, and how it's so helpful to have a teacher modeling for you. For our virtual students, not to have that, and only be maybe three percentage points behind was remarkable.

- Frenship Interview Participant

District personnel found that Apex had a positive impact on program outcomes (70%). 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

Aspect	District personnel
Rigor of the content	62%
Assistance planning for digital learning	53%
Technology integration	62%
Assistance incorporating Apex Learning into your district program	74%
Ease of navigating the LMS and content	58%
Product flexibility to meet your needs	60%
Catalog	53%
Platform features	59%
Assistance incorporating Apex Learning into your school program	56%
Alignment of the content to the state standards	65%
Assistance tracking student success	73%
Asssistance identifying program outcomes	57%

ABOUT HANOVER RESEARCH

Hanover Research provides high-quality, custom research and analytics through a cost-effective model that helps clients make informed decisions, identify and seize opportunities, and heighten their effectiveness.

OUR SOLUTIONS

ACADEMIC SOLUTIONS

- **College & Career Readiness:**
  Support on-time student graduation and prepare all students for post-secondary education and careers.

- **Program Evaluation:**
  Measure program impact to support informed, evidence-based investments in resources that maximize student outcomes and manage costs.

- **Safe & Supportive Environments:**
  Create an environment that supports the academic, cultural, and social-emotional needs of students, parents, and staff through a comprehensive annual assessment of climate and culture.

ADMINISTRATIVE SOLUTIONS

- **Family and Community Engagement:**
  Expand and strengthen family and community relationships and identify community partnerships that support student success.

- **Talent Recruitment, Retention & Development:**
  Attract and retain the best staff through an enhanced understanding of the teacher experience and staff professional development needs.

- **Operations Improvement:**
  Proactively address changes in demographics, enrollment levels, and community expectations in your budgeting decisions.

LEADERSHIP SOLUTION

Build a high-performing administration that is the first choice for students, parents, and staff.

OUR BENEFITS

EXPERT
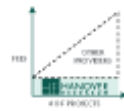200+ analysts with multiple methodology research expertise

FLEXIBLE
Ongoing custom research agenda adapts with organizations' needs

DEDICATED
Exclusive account and research teams ensure strategic partnership

EFFICIENT
Annual, fixed-fee model shares costs and benefits