



# **APEX LEARNING IMPLEMENTATION CASE STUDY – MANASSAS PARK CITY SCHOOLS**

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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 Manassas Park City Schools (MPCS). 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>14 school and district staff members, 86 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>Technology and 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 MANASSAS PARK CITY SCHOOLS

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 districts chose Apex because of how easy the platform is to navigate, the ability to customize curricula, and the many design features available for effective instruction. MPCS prioritized virtual instruction and credit recovery needs. Further, the district chose to expand its use of 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.

In searching for a digital curriculum provider, particularly following the onset of COVID-19, districts prioritized programs and services that offered virtual instruction and credit recovery tools that were easy to use. MPCS had previously used Apex since 2014, so the district and its decision-makers were familiar with set-up, account creation, and user requirements.

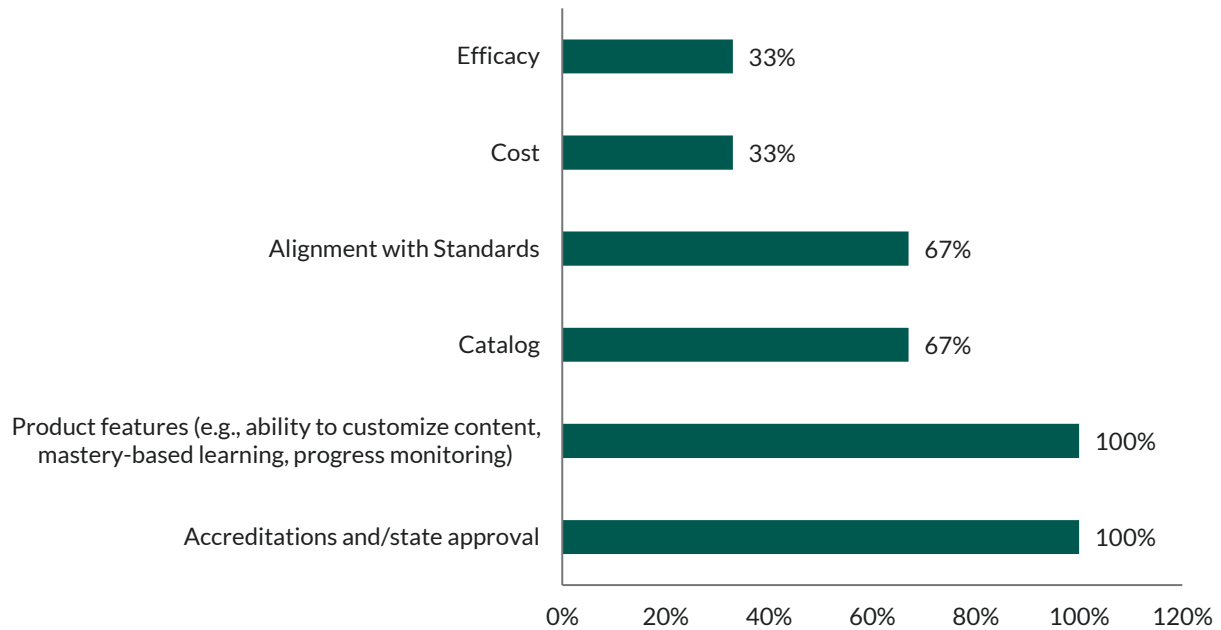
*"We always come back to Apex because it's so simple to use for both students and for staff. We really like the interface for all users, and users report that [it] is [easy] to navigate. And the nice thing is it's consistent from course to course. So, like I said, we have tried other products ... but Apex is our main go-to for all online classes.*

- Manassas Park 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.

When asked a similar question on why the district chose Apex, survey participants most often indicated that product features, such as the ability to customize the content, provide mastery-based learning, and conduct progress monitoring, contributed to their selection (100%). As illustrated in Figure 1.1, Apex's alignment with standards (67%) and accreditations and state approval (100%) also strongly influenced the district's decision to choose Apex.

**Figure 1.1: Factors Contributing to Manassas Park City Schools Choosing Apex**



*“When the schools closed back in March of 2020, we actually moved all of our courses online to Apex. Being that it was such an abrupt switch from in-person to all of a sudden where everybody's virtual, we created courses for every single teacher.”*

- Manassas Park 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 for districtwide virtual learning), the **district used Apex-provided professional development services most often and found the Educator Academy and Curriculum Alignment Customization** very helpful. District staff found these services very or extremely helpful, as noted in Figure 1.2.

**Figure 1.2: Apex Services Identified as Very or Extremely Helpful**



*"I also provided all the staff with all of Apex's training resources. The nice thing is that Apex has a pretty robust help center. And we use a lot of the resources, a lot of the videos from there."*

-Manassas Park Interview Participant

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 described how Apex units and lessons did not follow the same sequence as their current curricula. However, units were easy to modify so that lessons and tests aligned to in-person curricula. They also found the Apex interface easy to navigate and appreciated how the platform was consistent across courses.

## ONBOARDING AND GETTING STARTED



**When schools closed in March 2020, MPCS 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 was able to use Apex before the beginning of the 2020-21 school year and was better prepared to navigate the product.

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), MPCS **highlights successful strategies for integrating Apex and how helpful the Apex technical support team was.** Specifically, the planning support provided by Apex was noted, and 100% of respondents found the conferencing sessions with Success Managers to be very or extremely helpful. Seventy-eight percent of teachers felt prepared to implement Apex Learning curriculum after completing Apex and/or district-provided training or professional development.

*"[...] by pairing [students] up with teachers, mentor teachers, to help and guide them along the way, we've seen a lot of success with using Apex with all of our learners."*

- Manassas Park Interview Participant

Mentor teachers would check in with students frequently, especially during the first weeks, to answer questions and to keep the students engaged. When students or teachers struggled with a technical aspect, the district relied on Apex's quick and efficient technical support services.

*"So, if I send an email for a request, usually to their tech support, I usually receive an email back within a couple of hours, if not sooner. They're very responsive to me, and they really do work to try to troubleshoot whatever issues that you might be having."*

- Manassas Park Interview Participant

Furthermore, teachers across the district who were new to Apex were confronted with a large amount of new information and processes to learn given the extreme demands of pandemic-impacted operations during the school year. Certain teachers found the adjustment challenging until they became more familiar with the Apex materials. Others continued to need support to adopt Apex tools. However, teachers felt fortunate for readily available guidance and resources, which they leveraged to address concerns.

## IMPLEMENTATION



COVID-19 caused the district to adjust how they used Apex and quickly expand the number and types of students engaged with a virtual learning curriculum, prompting teachers to creatively incorporate Apex into their teaching practices and modify program components to meet students' needs. MPCS partnered students with mentor teachers and adapted the curriculum to meet their individual class needs.

COVID-19 caused the district to transition from using Apex for credit recovery to expanding its use to support hybrid and general education virtual learning. Figure 1.3 presents the division of the district's remote and at-school Apex curriculum uses.

Figure 1.3: Implementation of the Apex Curriculum According to Learning Environment

CURRICULUM USE		REMOTE STUDENTS	ON-CAMPUS STUDENTS
Curriculum	Core curriculum	89%	67%
	Supplemental curriculum	11%	33%
Instruction	All instruction	75%	50%
	Supplemental instruction	25%	50%
Instruction time	Over the full school year	38%	50%
	During a targeted period of time	63%	50%
Learning	Synchronous	0%	50%
	Asynchronous	100%	50%
Scope	Accessing full scope and sequence	33%	75%
	Accessing partial scope and sequence	67%	25%

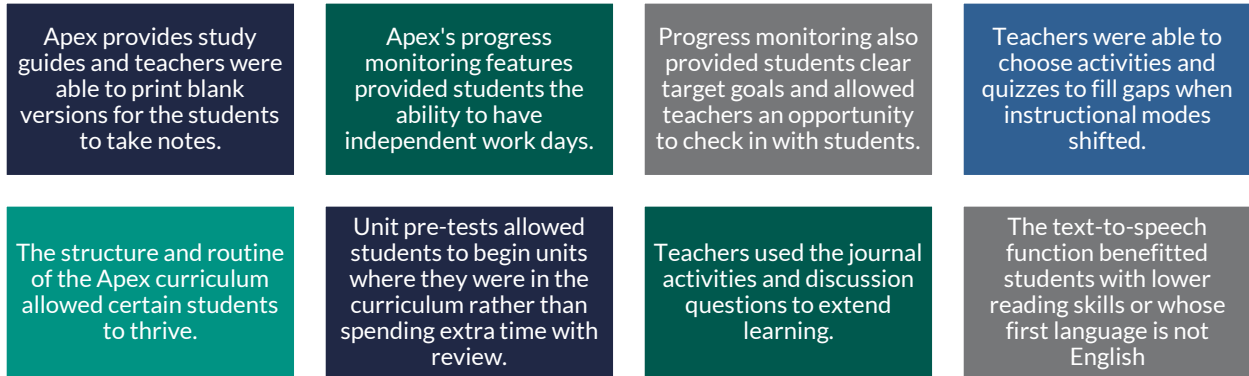
Additionally, focus group participants described how their district navigated the implementation stage by leveraging the range of materials and modifying their courses based on student needs and familiar teaching practices. For example, one focus group participant from Manassas Park described printing out study guides for students needing to take notes by hand to learn. Conversely, another Manassas Park focus group participant distributed study guides and quizzes through Apex in addition to meeting with hybrid and virtual learning students to ensure students grasped concepts and connected material.

*"[Apex curriculum] did a really good job of making it easier for me to relate a real-world context and directly relate it to their lives. So, I think those are the moments where I'm like, 'I really appreciate Apex,' because this was really easy and really easy to tie into my room. And that specific topic gave me an avenue right into my classroom."*

- Manassas Park Focus Group Participant

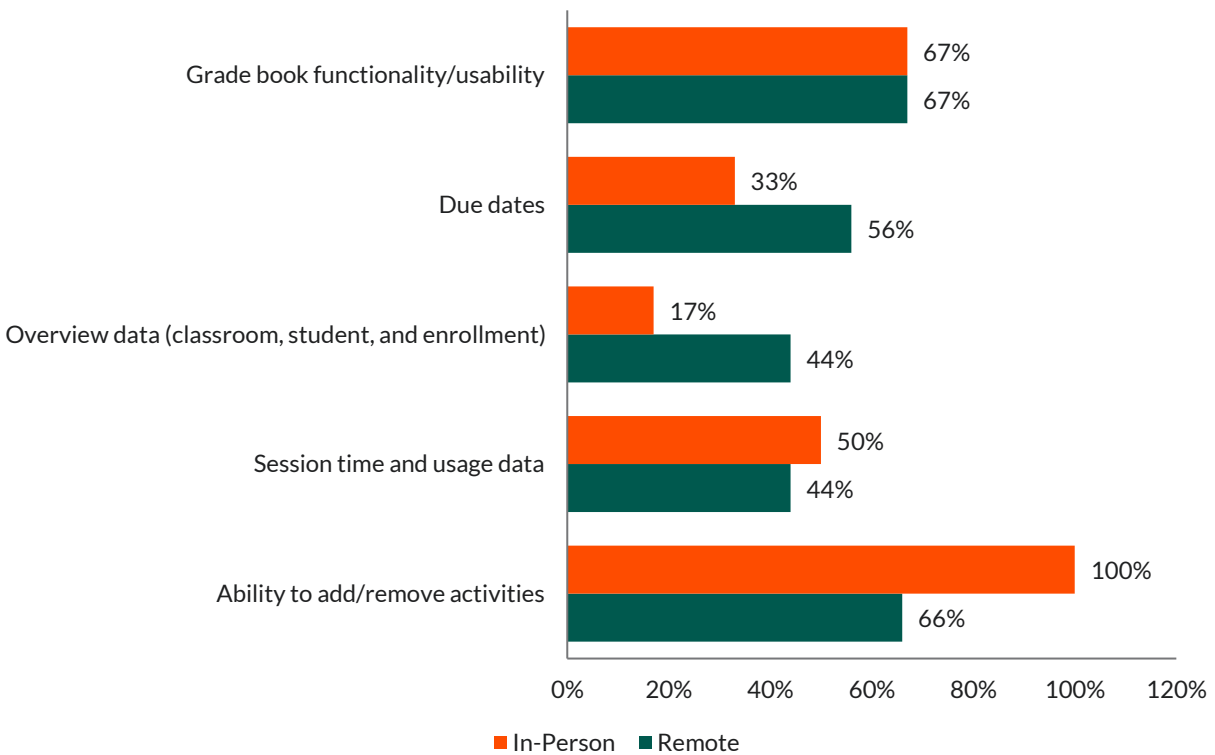
Apex users in MPCS also praise the flexibility and features of the Apex products and services. During focus groups, teachers highlighted the various elements that enabled them to succeed in a new and unfamiliar learning environment. Figure 1.4 presents some of the numerous ways teachers leveraged Apex's features and design details with their students.

**Figure 1.4: How Apex's Flexibility Supported Teachers**



Additionally, survey responses demonstrate that the most helpful Apex feature, whether their students followed a remote or in-person learning model, was the ability to remove activities. Respondents selected consistent features of Apex when asked which were the most helpful during remote and in-person instruction. 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**



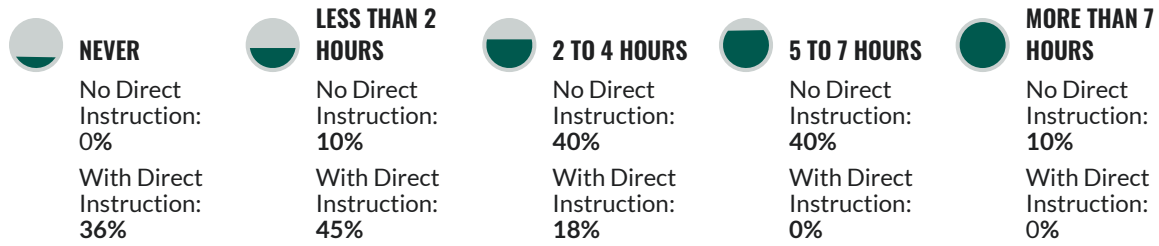


*“The geometry course inside of Apex has additional units that are not part of the Virginia Standards of Learning. So, we removed the stuff that they don't need, and then we add into Apex ... additional content that's created by our school. Honestly, I think it works really well. It's very easy to -- the ability to customize a course -- is very easy to use. And you could see the improvements [Apex] continues to make.”*

- Manassas Park Interview 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 (i.e., 5 hours/week/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**



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, 100% of students appeared engaged. Figure 1.77 illustrates these differences in engagement.

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

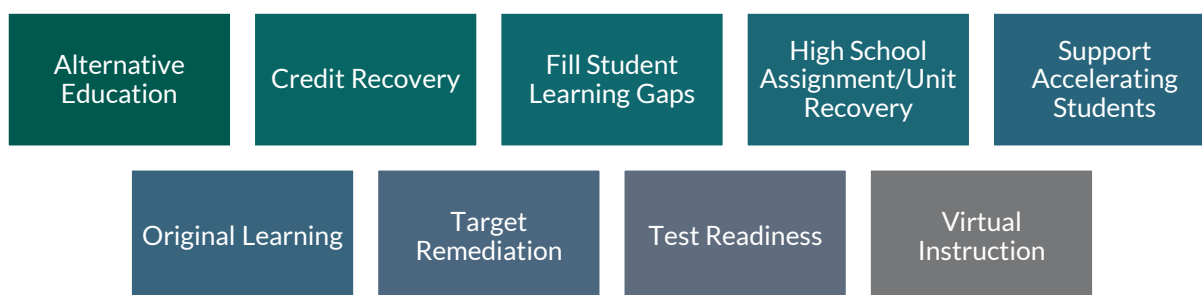
	COMPLETELY OR SOMEWHAT DISENGAGED	NEUTRAL	COMPLETELY OR SOMEWHAT ENGAGED
Students using the Apex curriculum independently without direct teacher instruction	50%	10%	40%
Students using the Apex curriculum with direct teacher instruction	0%	0%	100%

These results and focus group responses corroborate to show how **teacher guidance is a key component of student engagement, particularly with students with special education needs, and one that spans across all aspects of remote learning rather than being specific to Apex.** 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.

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).

After implementing the Apex curriculum during a school year impacted by COVID-19, **teachers demonstrated appreciation for Apex’s content and curriculum and how it allowed students to succeed when they otherwise would not have.** Although teachers would prefer certain adjustments (e.g., more videos, easier reading materials, slower pacing, more scaffolding), survey responses show that Apex positively impacted a wide range of program areas. Figure 1.8 details areas where teachers perceived Apex had a positive impact.

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



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

*“Summer school started this week for us, and we use Apex for all of our summer school courses. And I’ll be honest, the students need very little training or very little help with Apex, because now they are comfortable using it, since many of them have used it.”*

- Manassas Park Interview Participant

*“I also think for credit recovery classes, they have pretests, which I think are beneficial because instead of making the kids sit through things that they already know—if they’ve already taken the class and they say they know solving equations or whatever, they can show that they know that—and then being bumped to something that they don’t know that they need to practice on instead of wasting time on things that they already know.”*

- Manassas Park Focus Group Participant

## OUTCOMES



Despite COVID-19's impact on learning environments, Apex allowed MPCS teachers to employ a wide range of options to engage students and ensure their ultimate success. Over 90 percent of teachers who used the curriculum for supporting accelerated students, summer school, credit recovery, and high school unit recovery indicated that Apex positively impacted student outcomes and provided teachers with additional opportunities to provide feedback on progress and performance, especially given the unique communication challenges with virtual learning.

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. As described by focus group and interview participants, Apex provided the virtual platform needed to support students remotely and through a quick transition. Even in a completely virtual environment, Apex helped districts achieve successful results, including pass rates. Further, after teacher-made adjustments, Apex allowed teachers to devote more time to students.

*"Honestly, if I was to rate it, I'd give it an excellent for a lot of the reasons I had mentioned. It's just the ease of use and the interface for all users."*

- Manassas Park Interview Participant

All teachers and district staff found that Apex had a positive impact on program outcomes (100%), and three quarters were satisfied with the product's flexibility to meet district needs (75%).

District administrators note how Apex effectively supported student course completion and graduation, enabled virtual transfers of student work and data, and incorporated updates to facilitate virtual learning. Notably, a district staff member from MPCS described how Apex products and services support instruction by making modifications that meet district needs.

*"One additional change that wasn't available in the past, but was opened up just late last year, was the ability to change the order of the units and whatnot. And that was always another thing that teachers wanted to do but wasn't an option. But that was added last year. I think Apex does a great job at listening to a customer's needs, and then adapting to those changes."*

-Manassas Park Interview Participant

*"Once [students] realize that we can see the exact dates that they logged in and the exact amount of time that they were logged in for and the exact assignments that they handed in on specific days-- once I start talking about those things, it definitely kicks up their progress a little bit more."*

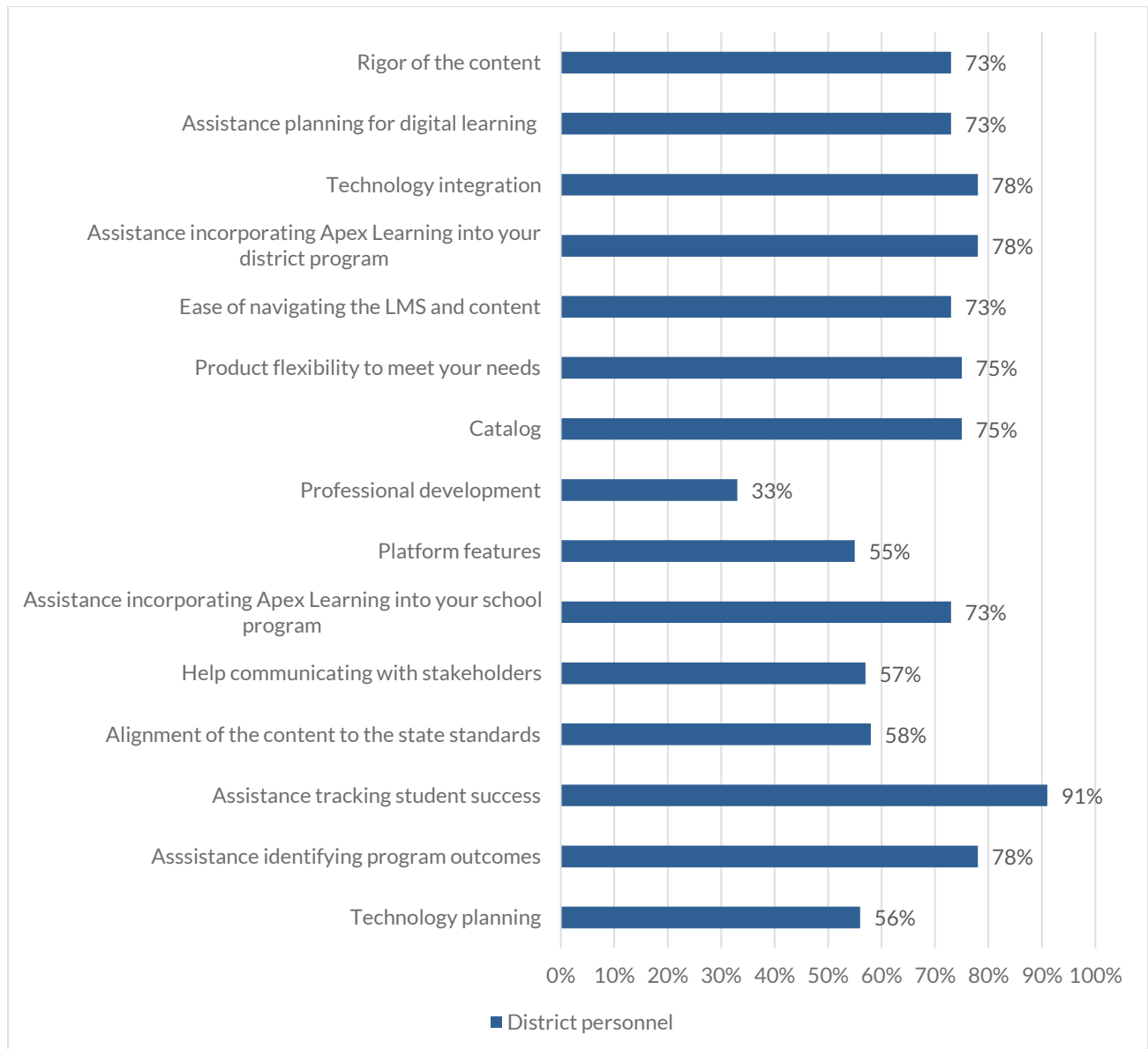
-Manassas Park Focus Group Participant

*"Apex gives us that ability to give that extra support to those [students] that need it."*

-Manassas Park Focus Group Participant

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**



# 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.

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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:**  
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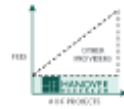
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### DEDICATED

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