



APEX LEARNING IMPLEMENTATION CASE STUDY – MATANUSKA-SUSITNA BOROUGH SCHOOL DISTRICT

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 from an analysis of the data provided by Matanuska-Susitna Borough School District (Mat-Su). 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 and focus groups 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>Survey Administration and Dashboard</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 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"> ○ To what extent did using Apex improve virtual and hybrid instructional program outcomes? ○ 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? 	<p>104 school and district staff members, 92 percent of whom used Apex for direct instruction with students</p>
 <p>Focus Group Sessions and Analysis*</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 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? 	<p>Focus group comprised of staff members.</p>

CASE STUDY: STAKEHOLDER PERCEPTIONS AND EXPERIENCES WITH APEX LEARNING IN MATANUSKA-SUSITNA BOROUGH 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 focus group conversations and survey responses indicate that Mat-Su had used Apex extensively before the pandemic. Mat-Su chose to expand its use of Apex in response to COVID-19 because the platform allowed extensive flexibility during hybrid instruction. Apex curriculum gave teachers at Mat-Su the ability to manage their scope and sequence more efficiently as students transitioned between in-person and virtual learning. Most teachers in the district were new to Apex in the 2020-21 school year, but the district's extensive experience with the platform enabled quick implementation.

In searching for a digital curriculum provider, particularly following the onset of COVID-19, Mat-Su 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.

The district noted how easy Apex products were to incorporate quickly, and the district found that their familiarity with Apex, 62% of survey responses indicated they were very or extremely familiar, made expanding their use of its products and services easier than adopting a completely new platform. Because the district closed schools twice in the fall of 2020 and once in the spring of 2021, Apex allowed teachers to maintain pacing and provide consistency for their students despite the changing instructional environments.

"I was very grateful for having Apex for the kids who were out for prolonged periods of time because they could still keep up with our class while they were at home."

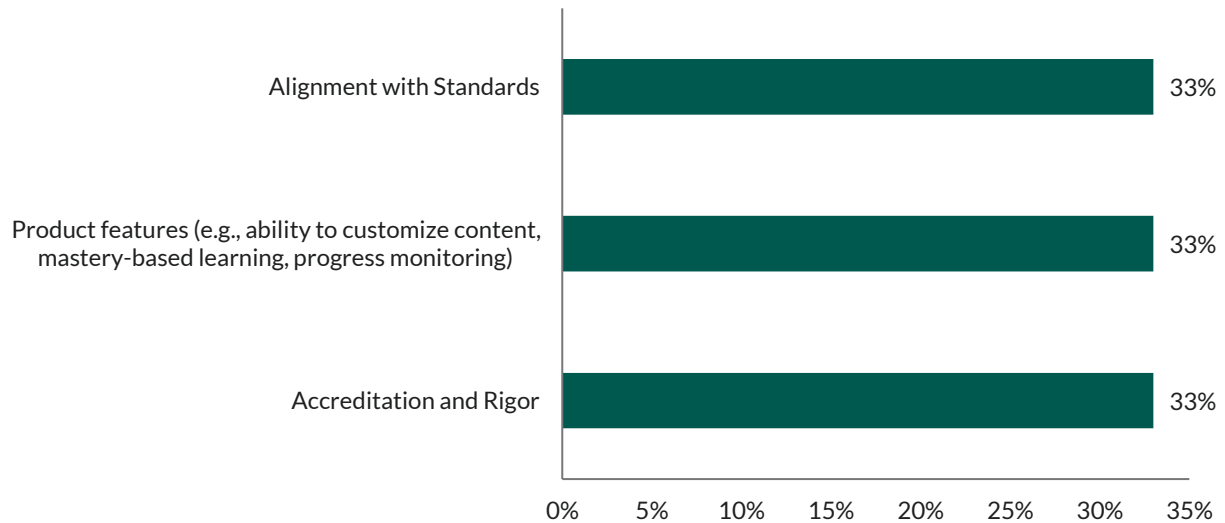
- Mat-Su Focus Group Participant

"Maybe the biggest way it helped me was for students that got quarantined. They could come back at the exact same place as the rest of the class. The students could follow [the curriculum] the same way they would follow me if we were in class."

- Mat-Su Focus Group Participant

When asked 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 features, and accreditation and rigor strongly influenced the district’s decision to choose Apex.

Figure 1.1: Factors Contributing to Mat-Su Borough School District Choosing Apex



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 Curriculum Alignment Customization most often and found the Professional Development and Educator Academy very helpful. Figure 1.2 highlights the percentage of respondents who found these services very or extremely helpful.

Figure 1.2: Apex Services Identified as Very or Extremely Helpful



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

“The nicest things [about] Apex is you can change it as much or as little as you want to meet the needs of the students that you’re dealing with. For example, we, as a district, do pretty standard two attempts at quizzes. Whereas with my AP classes, they only get one attempt. There’s a consequence for being late. So, the ability to cater the platform to whatever it is or whomever it is that you’re presenting it to is actually a huge benefit to have.”

- Mat-Su Focus Group Participant

ONBOARDING AND GETTING STARTED



During the 2020-21 school year, Mat-Su ensured its teachers were able to teach online using Apex. The district allowed for the customization of courses and for teachers to use their own materials in conjunction with the Apex curriculum to meet the needs of their students.

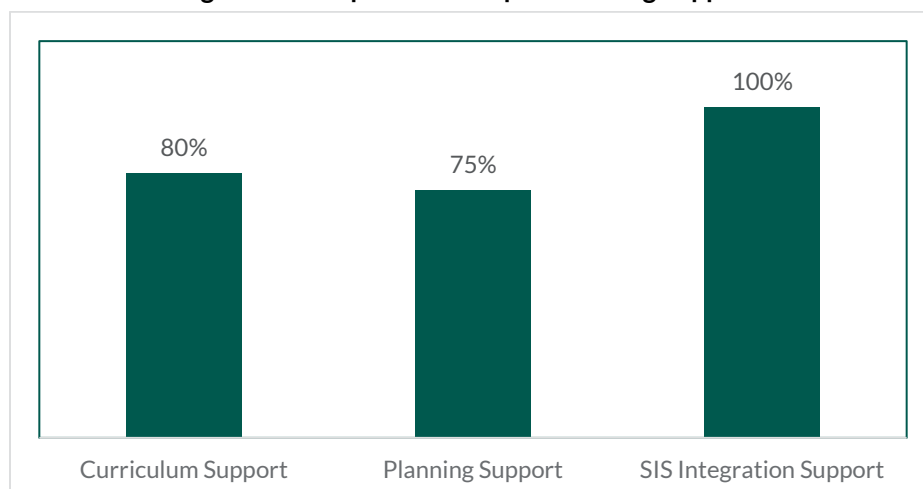
Mat-Su personnel attended planning meetings with Apex Success Managers and utilized other Apex-provided services, including webinars, to prepare for the 2020-21 school year. Combined with district-provided professional development workshops and one-on-one coaching, nearly all teachers (98%) in the district felt prepared to implement Apex Learning curriculum.

“We used it, at first, in the first couple of weeks just to make sure kids were all familiar with it and how to access it and things like that. It was ... left up to the teacher how frequently they would use it. But the general idea was that if we needed to pivot to distance education, then that’s what we would use for that purpose.”


- Mat-Su Focus Group Participant

Overall, Mat-Su survey participants believed the supports provided by Apex to be helpful. Figure 1.3 identifies the percentage of respondents who agree that the listed supports were very or extremely helpful.

Figure 1.3: Helpfulness of Apex Learning Supports



IMPLEMENTATION



Mat-Su teachers had to adjust quickly to changing instructional situations. Teachers developed a wide range of strategies to integrate Apex into their lesson plans. Some Focus Group participants used Apex daily, while others used Apex-provided materials to reinforce learning and ease the transition for students between virtual and in-person instruction.

COVID-19 caused the district to transition from using Apex for credit recovery to expanding use to support hybrid and general education 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	82%	65%
	Supplemental curriculum	18%	35%
Instruction	All instruction	67%	34%
	Supplemental instruction	33%	66%
Instruction time	Over the full school year	60%	48%
	During a targeted period of time	40%	52%
Learning	Synchronous	38%	68%
	Asynchronous	62%	32%
Scope	Accessing full scope and sequence	65%	50%
	Accessing partial scope and sequence	35%	50%

Despite certain challenges integrating Apex with existing technology and curriculum (e.g., teachers new to the platform adjusting to the tools, integrating technology with existing management systems and grade books), **Mat-Su teachers highlight successful strategies for integrating Apex**, including pairing traditional resources with Apex features and using progress monitoring tools to track student work.

"I would say for me the Gradebook view is very, very important, and the little green bar, yellow bar, red bar ... it's a good, helpful indicator. And the weekly emails to the parents are also a very good, helpful indicator for parents to see where kids are at and how they're progressing in their class."

- Mat-Su Focus Group Participant

"Those little discovery tools or those things in the study guide where they can move things around and discover and play were really excellently done. And another great thing was that if we, all of a sudden, were in shutdown and we were planning a test the next day, the test could happen virtually anyways. That was slick. That was really slick."

- Mat-Su Focus Group Participant

Focus Group participants also highlight how Apex helps teachers when tasked with working with multiple grade levels and with students in non-traditional situations.

"There's no way one teacher can teach middle school classes through high school classes, all of the different courses. Apex really helps out in the fact that we have a way to put kids in multiple courses."

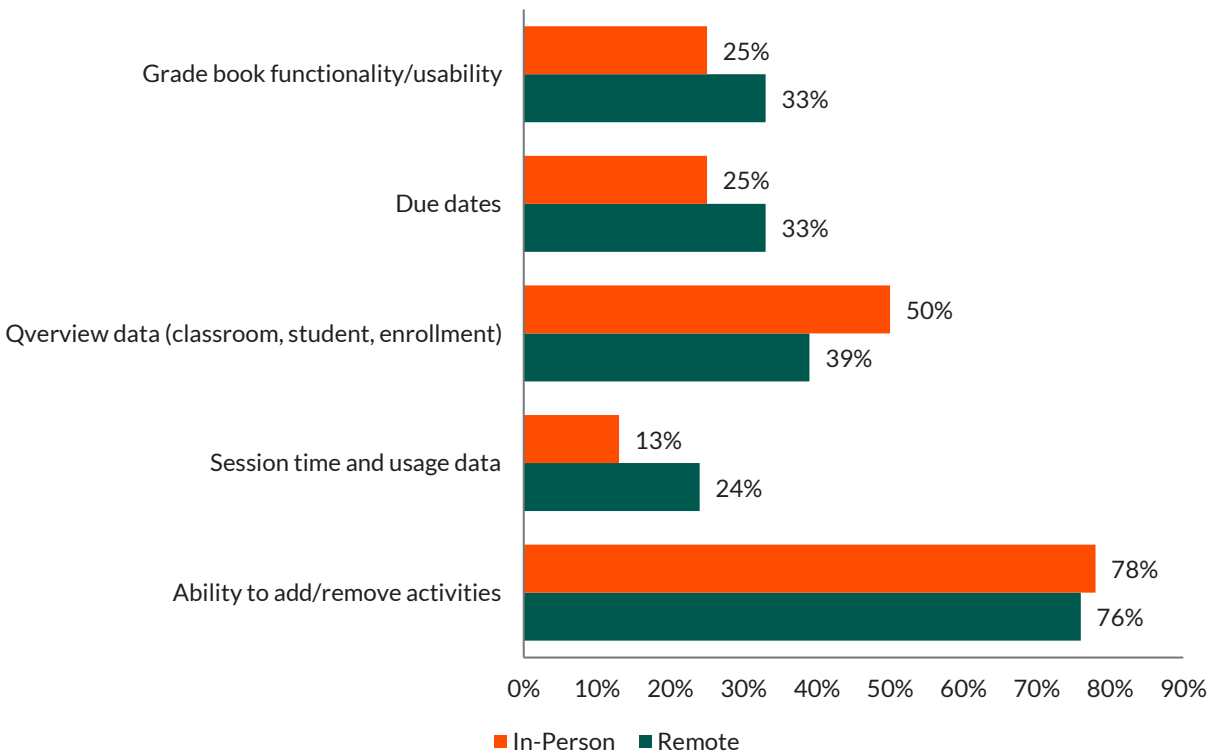
- Mat-Su Focus Group Participant

"We didn't know, as case counts were rising, if we would be open or closed the next day. So, it was ... comforting to know that if in some cases we got less than 24 hours' notice that we were switching to at-home for a couple of days having the ability, [Apex], to pivot to in those situations was helpful."

- Mat-Su Focus Group Participant

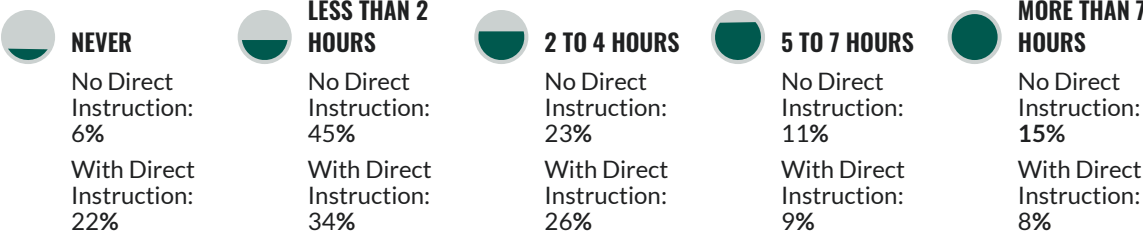
Additionally, survey responses demonstrate several additional helpful Apex features, whether students followed a remote or in-person learning model. Figure 1.5 contains the top five features for instruction within each learning environment.

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



Like districts across the country, Mat-Su teachers struggled with engagement during virtual instruction, but Apex provided teachers in the district a familiar and dynamic tool to help solve this problem. 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. Students spent more hours (five or more) engaging with Apex without direct instruction by the teacher.

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



Similarly, Mat-Su teachers reported that Apex was more engaging when teachers were providing direct instruction. According to survey results, 33% of students were engaged without direct teacher instruction. In contrast, with teacher instruction, 59% of students were engaged. 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 without direct teacher instruction	54%	14%	33%
Students using the Apex curriculum with direct teacher instruction	29%	12%	59%

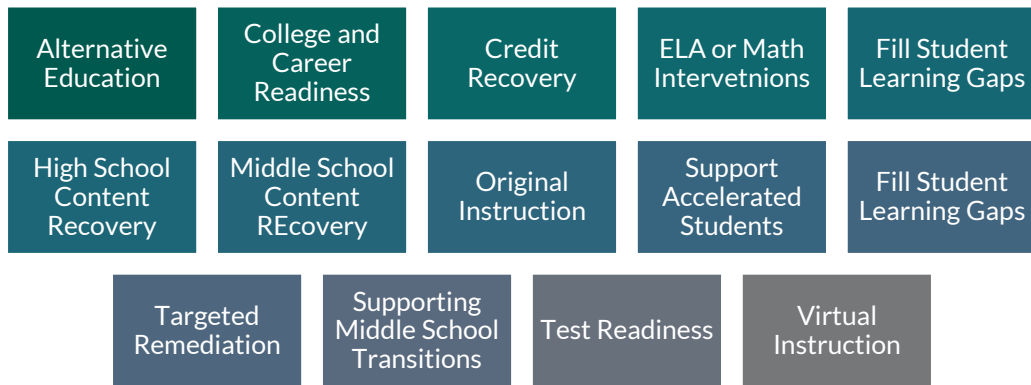
Survey results and focus group responses clearly demonstrate that **teacher interaction is a key component of student engagement, with or without Apex**. Teachers being present to start lessons, explain concepts, and guide student navigation of the digital curriculum results in greater student engagement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

“Apex seems to try to engage students from every different learning angle they can.”

- Mat-Su Focus Group Participant

All Mat-Su focus group participants expressed the need to adapt the Apex curriculum to their students and needs, especially when moving between virtual and in-person instruction. This combination of strategies resulted in positive outcomes for students. 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



"I think most of them have had a really positive experience with their math this year with Apex."

- Mat-Su Focus Group Participant

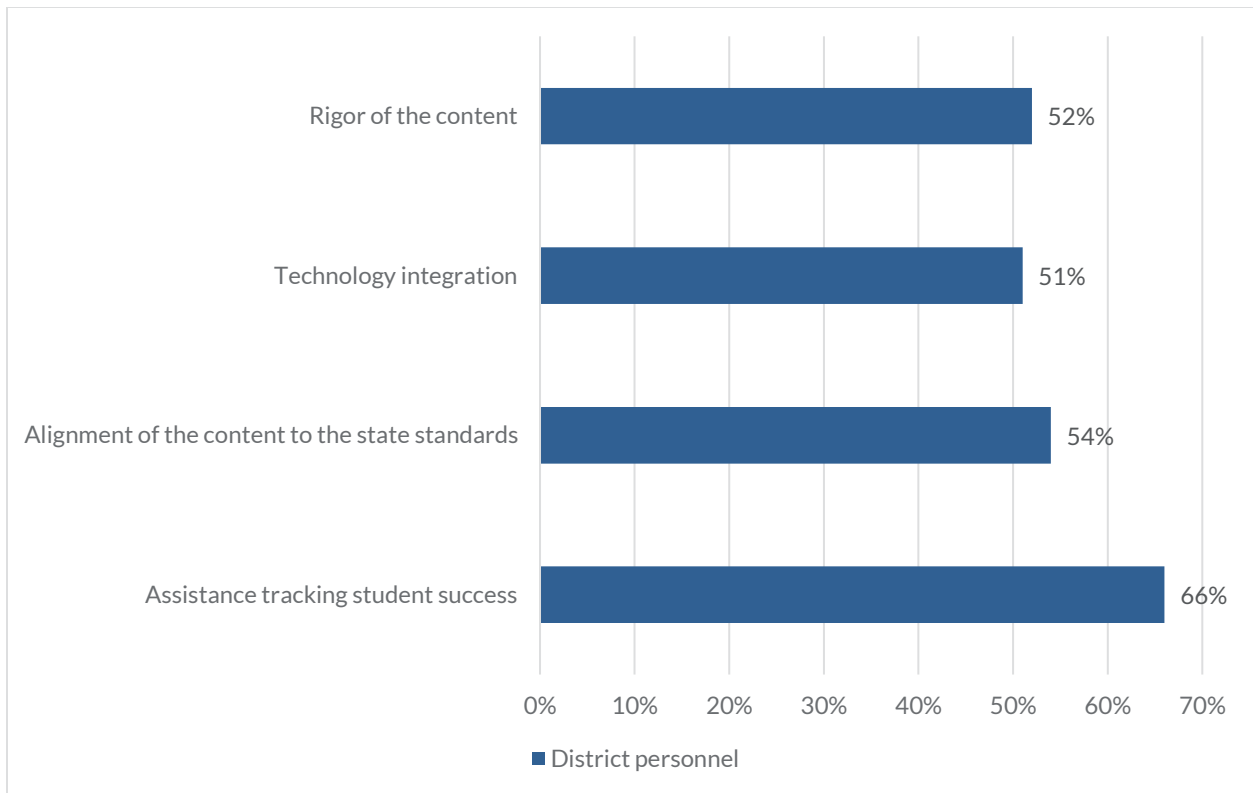
OUTCOMES



Using Apex pushed Mat-Su teachers to identify and employ a wide range of strategies to keep students on an appropriate learning path. Teachers felt supported in meeting that challenge, as 82% of district teachers were somewhat or completely satisfied with the support they received from Apex to evaluate student outcomes and/or program success.

Mat-Su staff felt the Apex platform helped them support their students despite the unique challenges caused by the pandemic. Teacher experiences with Apex varied depending on courses and levels taught, but overall, district personnel found that Apex had a positive impact on program outcomes (86%). 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



“As far as our AP students using Apex solely, 83% of them scored a three or higher. So that’s pretty high when you can see that the national pass rate is right around 34%. My pass rate has stayed the same, whether I had the kids in front of me or whether the kids were using Apex.”

- Mat-Su Focus Group Participant

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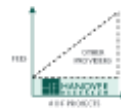
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