

The background of the entire page is a solid orange color. Overlaid on this background is a large, faint, stylized graphic of a hand with fingers spread, rendered in a lighter shade of orange. The hand is positioned in the upper right quadrant, with its fingers pointing towards the bottom right. In the top left corner, the text 'D2L' is written in a bold, white, sans-serif font, followed by a small 'TM' trademark symbol.

D2L™

From 'Last Chance' to Sky's the Limit

*Bishop Hall Charter School is transforming students' lives through
flexible online learning*

Overview

US students are graduating from high schools at a higher rate than ever before. The nation's high school graduation rate hit 82% in 2013-2014, the highest level since the States adopted a new uniform way of calculating graduation rates five years ago.¹

However, there are still those left behind. Struggling with a myriad of challenges from mental health issues, to teen pregnancy and family discord, a small percentage of teens fail to thrive in the traditional school system. Without the right kind of school setting and flexible programming tailored to their unique needs, these kids often become discouraged and drop out.

Bishop Hall Charter School, a public charter alternative school located in Thomasville, Georgia, was established in 1999 to serve the "last chance" population of students. Providing a safe sanctuary for students who cannot survive in the mainstream, Bishop Hall's unique learning environment focuses on the whole student, not just the academics.

Now, the school has been able to completely transform its approach to virtual learning, offering Bishop Hall's unique student body more flexibility and options than ever before to demonstrate their learning and pave a path to graduation, and it's using the Brightspace learning management system (LMS) to do it.

AT A GLANCE

Client	Bishop Hall Charter School
Students	193
Faculty	13
Level	K-12
Solution	Brightspace Online and Blended Learning Solution
Services	Technical Account Services

CHALLENGE

- Raise county graduation rate
- Provide a "last chance" resource for students who otherwise would drop out of traditional school system
- Offer a true blended learning approach with support for off campus learning and greater teacher/student interaction

SOLUTION

- Brightspace Blended Learning Solutions for K-12

RESULT

- Increased county graduation rate from mid 60's to 84 percent
- Increased Bishop Hall Charter Schools graduation rate from 20 percent to 55.6 percent largely attributed to introduction of blended learning

¹<http://www.ed.gov/news/press-releases/us-high-school-graduation-rate-hits-new-record-high-0>



Challenge

Back in 1999, the high school graduation rate in Thomasville was hovering between 60 and 70 percent; even at the time, this was far too low when contrasted with national graduation averages. Kids struggling within the conventional system had few options, and most ended up dropping out. Recognizing that something must be done to improve support for struggling students and as result, bring up the graduation rate, Bishop Hall Charter School was founded. With the backing of the Thomas County and the school board, the school's founding members set out to provide non-traditional educational opportunities to high-risk students. Since 1999, more than 415 students, who would likely not have graduated from a traditional school, have been able to flourish and graduate thanks to Bishop Hall's unique curriculum design and wrap-around services.

“Our mission from day one has been to serve a last chance population of students who don't make it in the mainstream for a variety of reasons,” says Chris Huckans, Principal of Bishop Hall Charter School and a member of the school's founding team. “They all have stories. Some are required at home to help, or have to work. Others have suffered an illness or struggle with mental health issues. The reality is, if our school didn't exist, these kids would have likely have been lost to us.”

Since its inception, Bishop Hall Charter School has used a performance-based system for awarding academic credits, allowing students who have fallen behind academically to work at their own pace to complete courses in a compacted time period. The school has also relied on online and hybrid courses combining

traditional face-to-face instruction with online. This allowed students the flexibility to complete high school courses online with the support of local teachers based at Bishop Hall, and it accommodated students who cannot maintain a conventional schedule, such as those who must work during the day and young mothers who do not have daycare, allowing them to complete school work during evenings and weekends.

However, while Bishop Hall's virtual schooling allowed students the flexibility they needed, it did not completely fulfill the definition of a true blended learning experience, and lacked the two-way communication and interaction of a more robust learning management system (LMS).

About four years ago, supported by a generous state grant, Bishop Hall set out to implement a comprehensive blended learning strategy and LMS with the goals of raising its graduation rate, provide an even wider array of opportunities for students to complete college courses while enrolled at Bishop Hall, and prepare high-risk students for college, a career and post-secondary life. The grant also funded a full-time technology specialist, several part-time after-hours teaching positions, and a Google Chromebook™ to each student so they could access schoolwork anywhere, anytime.

As the team began searching for the perfect LMS, D2L and the Brightspace platform kept popping up on the radar. “Brightspace really fit with what we wanted to do,” says Marcus Parsley, Bishop Hall Charter School instructor and virtual education coordinator.



Solution

Getting up and running with a blended curriculum is a big hill to climb for any school. Fortunately, Bishop Hall was able to quickly kickstart its program and Brightspace implementation by leveraging an existing blended learning curriculum developed to state standards by Georgia Virtual School. “It gave us a very valuable starting point,” says Marcus Parsely. “We could begin with the state standard, and then individualize curriculum and education paths for each student.”

Adaptive learning and personalized learning paths are key at Bishop Hall Charter School. Students come to the school already behind, so giving them a variety of ways to express their learning in their own individualized way helps build their confidence and keeps them engaged. “We try very hard to find the student where they are, simplify content and yet still meet the state standard,” says Parsely. “Some students want to watch a video. Some want you to sit next to them and show them how. Others want to listen to the lesson. Brightspace allows for that varied content delivery. Many of our students have Individual Education Plans (IEPs) and the platform makes our job as teachers much easier, because we can offer students a learning path tailored to their unique needs.”

While the entire school participates in some kind of online learning with Brightspace, currently there are 14 students participating in a true blended learning program, where they are on campus two to three days a week, then off campus for the other days. “When students are at home, accountability is typically all on them. Even for the best students this can be a struggle,” says Parsely. “We find the Brightspace platform is making them more successful. Our blended learning students communicate differently. They know they can contact

us anytime, and utilize that resource more than those students who are in the classroom all day long. This is the result of us all using Brightspace, even when a student is not in front of us every day, we can still deliver the content they need to progress. And they can open the content sitting at home, and connect with us to talk about the assignment and expectations. It’s really wonderful.”

Parsely relates the story of one student who, due to unfortunate family circumstances, is splitting her time between parents located in two different states. “She’s a wonderful kid. The Brightspace platform has enabled her to transition back and forth without slowing down her forward progress. When she is out of state she is always texting me, submitting work, working hard, and takes the Brightspace platform wherever she goes. As a result, she will very likely graduate with her cohort. Being in a blended program has allowed her not to get lost in the system.”

Principal Chris Huckans’ voice fills with emotion when he relates another story of a teen who came to the school having been bullied in the past, but who now shines at Bishop Hall, becoming one of the school’s best ambassadors. “He has become our social butterfly and is one of the most welcoming students, helping new kids get settled. We want everyone to know they are welcome here.”



Result

Bishop Hall Charter School has absolutely made a difference in the lives of students who otherwise would likely drop out and never graduate. In the eight years it has been in operation, the graduation rate in Thomas County has risen from the mid 60s to 84 percent, slightly above the national graduation rate average. Graduation rates at Bishop Hall Charter School have also risen, from just 20 percent to 55.6 percent.

“Our kids are loving the Brightspace way. They are able to demonstrate their individual strengths and show in their own way they know the material. Assignments are all in Brightspace and teachers are there to help them. All that varied content, all the choices and flexibility in the platform removes all the hurdles of learning,” says Huckans.

Now well established with its blended learning program, teachers at Bishop Hall Charter School are beginning to break free of the original baseline curriculum. “Our teachers are now using Brightspace to create their own creative curriculum and offer individualized learning paths so students can demonstrate they have standards mastery,” says Huckans. “Brightspace has provided our teachers with ownership and they are running with it. They keep coming to me excited and asking for new resources. What a wonderful problem for a principal to have.”

About D2L

D2L is the software leader that makes the learning experience better. The company's cloud-based platform—Brightspace—is not a common one-size-fits-all learning management system (LMS). It's easier to use, more flexible, and smart. With Brightspace, you can personalize the experience for every learner to deliver real results. The company is also a world leader in learning analytics: its platform predicts learner performance so that you can take action in real time to keep them on track. Brightspace is used by learners in higher education, K-12, and the enterprise sector, including the Fortune 1000. D2L has operations in the United States, Canada, Europe, Australia, Brazil, and Singapore. | www.D2L.com

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