



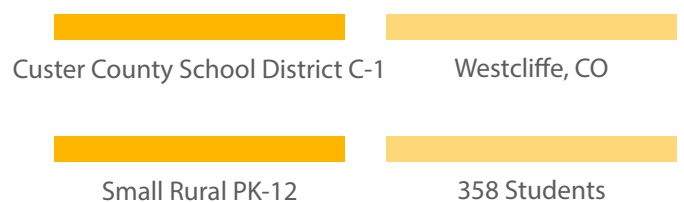
Providing Diverse Foreign  
Language Opportunities  
To Rural Students &  
Experience with  
Distance Learning



# Executive Summary

Foreign language is an entry requirement for many colleges and universities, but staffing a full-time teacher for this subject is challenging due to the student-teacher ratio at Custer County, where the high school has only ~100 students. Custer County thus sought to leverage the supplemental online courses provided by [Colorado Digital Learning Solutions](#) and supported by the [Colorado Empowered Learning Program](#) to meet this need. In doing so, they discovered an additional benefit: the virtual format itself. Every student is now required to take one virtual class so that they can be prepared for the distance learning offerings of colleges and vocational schools.

## Stats



# The Idea

Supplemental online courses can make it possible for small rural districts to provide foreign language opportunities to students, as well as experience taking distance learning classes, a format that is required by both colleges and vocational schools.

# How it Works

**Start Small:** Custer County began with a specific need: it wanted to offer foreign language classes to students so that they could meet this entry requirement for colleges and universities. It reached out to [Colorado Digital Learning Solutions](#) to make these courses available to their students, and found with this option they could not only meet the foreign language requirement, they could offer students a wide range of options.

**Monitor Student Engagement & Expand Based on Interest:** while the initial foreign language course options felt motivated by necessity, once administration noticed the high levels of student engagement, they started to expand supplemental online course choices to other subject areas.

**Value the Format:** Custer County now requires that every student take one elective in the supplemental online / distance learning format. This is to ensure that students are prepared for this format, which is often required by both colleges and vocational schools and can be challenging for those less familiar with technology and/or more used to personal face-to-face interactions in their learning. It felt particularly important for the Custer County, which includes large Amish and Mennonite communities as well as many home-schooled students.

**Logistics:** Roughly 30 students participate in the supplemental online courses each semester. Custer county allows no more than 3 courses to be completed during the students' high school career, and they must have a C or better to get tuition reimbursement. (There are no fees for the one required course, however.) The virtual courses are scheduled in the same manner as other classes, with students reporting to the distance learning lab at appropriate times. A full-time paraprofessional monitors the lab and supports students in pacing.

# Purpose & Impact

## Increased Student Enrollment

Custer County has succeeded in attracting some of the home school students in the area to engage with the school through the supplemental online program. They register for the virtual classes and then also can participate in activities such as band. This has helped the district financially and provided new opportunities to students in its area.

## New Ways to Engage Students

Custer County has a large farming and ranching community, so a lot of students go on to vocational opportunities. The district believes that education should be 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year, and sees online opportunities as a strategy for moving past the brick and mortar boundaries of the school, engaging students at the times when they are ready to be engaged.

# Lessons Learned

**Communicate with Staff** without strong communications, teachers can wonder whether the supplemental online program is intended to replace their jobs. It is important to educate your staff and your board about what the program is, and perhaps more importantly, what it is not. Clearly articulating the needs and intentions behind rolling out the program is critical.

**Support Students.** online learning is a different modality, and a struggling student can feel like they are doing everything and not understand why they are not more successful. These classes have a high level of rigor and require a disciplined approach to time management. The school guidance counselor meets with students to ensure they understand what is expected of them when taking an online course.

## [About Colorado Empowered Learning](#)

Colorado Empowered Learning is the implementation support program that aims to help educators statewide combine the use of technology with great instructional practices. Program services are delivered by non-profit providers Colorado Digital Learning Solutions and iLearn Collaborative.