







Optimizing Teacher Time to Create Opportunities for Rural Students



Executive Summary

South Routt is a small rural district that leverages Colorado Empowered Learning's supplemental courses supported by [Colorado Digital Learning Solutions](#) in order to provide additional course offerings to students and to address scheduling conflicts. In their model, they leverage an experienced, certified classroom teacher to serve as a site coordinator. In this role, she ensures that students succeed in a digital setting, developing the independent study skills required for success in college, career, and life. This teacher is then supported by a paraprofessional, the school guidance counselor, and the multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS) coordinator, ensuring the identification of and support for all students who would benefit from the program.

Stats

 South Routt RE3	 Routt, Colorado
 Small Rural PK-12	 327 Students

The Idea

A site coordinator, when combined with supplemental digital courses and support from [Colorado Digital Learning Solutions](#) staff, can make it possible for schools to leverage their instructional resources differently, ensuring that available qualified licensed teachers are best positioned to support students

How it Works

Identify a Site Coordinator: Brenda Little was teaching middle school English when she was given the opportunity to become a site coordinator. In this new role, she would support students taking a wide variety of digital courses and help the school library become a true learning environment and hub of the school. At the time she was concerned that she did not have the technology background to be successful in the role, but she soon learned that her strong classroom management skills were what was really needed. Specifically, students needed someone to guide them in a more independent setting. She has now been in the site coordinator role for nearly 14 years.

Obtain Student Commitment: South Routt charges a registration fee of \$25 for every class that a student wants to take digitally and requires parents and students to sign a contract outlining expectations for digital learning. (Example contract here.)

This forces students to stop and think about whether they really want to commit to taking the class. The district does provide scholarships and waive the fee in case of hardship, but that process too forces a commitment to doing the work for the program. Students who fail their digital classes are required to pay the district back for the full cost of the class.

Schedule Digital Classes: Incorporate digital classes into the student schedule, setting aside at least one hour each day for each class. All students participating in an digital class report to the library to do the work for that class with the support and guidance of the site coordinator.

Leverage Paras to Amplify Teacher Impact: The site coordinator can also continue to serve as a traditional classroom teacher with the support of a paraprofessional, treating the site coordinator role the workload equivalent of one class. To ensure effectiveness in both roles, it is important for the site coordinator's classroom to be near the library, making him or her more accessible to support the para. The site coordinator and the para should talk daily about kids that appear to be struggling, watching their grades, and developing plans to support them. The para can then implement the plans, with the site coordinator checking in with each student roughly twice a week

Coordinate with School Team: the school guidance counselor and Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) coordinator both also partner with the site coordinator to identify students that are strong independent learners and would thus thrive in a digital setting as well as opportunities to leverage digital learning for credit recovery.

Customize Support: some students don't need anything from the site coordinator at all. Other students require intensive support, where the site coordinator will print out the grade sheet in sequential order to tell the student what to do and when to do it and/or work with students at

the end of the day to catch up on missed work. Still other students need support somewhere in between. If a course has multiple parts, the site coordinator can help break those parts down for the student, reviewing the first part together.

Leverage the 4-day Week: The 4-day week has also been a learning opportunity around responsibility. Digital course assignments will be due on Fridays and the student is required to plan for this, even though the school is otherwise not open on this day. Those who do not complete their assignments can be recommended for "Friday school." South Routt's library is open 12PM-4PM Fridays and supported by two certified teachers. Students who fall behind in their classes, both digital and traditional, thus have an opportunity to come in and have the support of a teacher to catch up and receive coaching on how to work through the directions provided. The lessons in time management and planning for digital coursework, however, have proven effective: typically only 10% of online students make use of Friday school.

Coordinate with Online Teacher: the online teacher is the expert in the subject matter area, determining the coursework and grading all assignments. The site coordinator handles follow up with students, logging into the digital system each Sunday to check on grades and working with students to figure out why grades are not where they needed to be when that's the case. The site coordinator typically only needs to have an active dialogue with the digital teacher when students have a story for why they have not completed their work that seems implausible. The clear division of responsibilities ensures effective and clear support for students.

Purpose & Impact

Scheduling Flexibility

South Routt has a very tight schedule with one teacher supporting each of science, history, art and physical education. As a result, students often struggle to fit everything they need to take into their schedule - the supplemental courses are a necessary strategy for addressing scheduling conflicts.

Additional Educational Opportunities

Moreover, the catalog available through Colorado Empowered Learning offers a wide range of courses that the district would be unable to provide - over 100 offerings. For a budget that is the equivalent of half an FTE, the supplemental program makes it possible to schedule 30 kids at any time of day and hour, in a given year, across 18 different classes. It is simply not possible to find one person that could monitor those kids at every hour of the day and is an expert in all of those subjects. South Routt has talked about cutting the digital learning budget on and off over the last 14 years, but in the end, the district cannot get as much fill for the schedule in any other way. While they have not yet put a student in a Mandarin class, they can also feel proud knowing that the option is there for those who want it.

Student Success

And best of all, with the support of Brenda in the site coordinator role, students are excelling in their digital classes. Currently, 25 students are enrolled in the program, and historically over 95% of students received passing grades in their courses. And they are learning important study skills and independent learning techniques that will prepare them for success in college, career, and life.

Lessons Learned

Make sure that you have the time with the kids. It is critical to designate a time and place for digital learning and to supervise students while they are doing it. The site coordinator needs to be involved with students from the beginning. For those new to the site coordinator role, you can use a back door in the system to familiarize yourself with the course content, helping you to identify strategies for supporting students, such as printing out tutorials. As a teacher becomes more experienced as a site coordinator, this will no longer be necessary.

Make sure to obtain commitment from the students. The course has to be meaningful to the students or they will not succeed in it. Strategies such as the commitment contract, the course registration fee, and the required reimbursement for course costs if the student fails the course can all help support this.

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.