
commentaries

Online classes expand horizons of rural students

By DAMIAN CREAMER

John F. Kennedy once said, "Our progress as a nation can be no swifter than our progress in education." The progress made since President Kennedy's remarks more than 40 years ago is astounding, especially regarding the way technology has irrevocably changed the educational landscape.

As an educator pioneering the landscape of online high school education, I constantly witness this progress in the form of our students' success. Primavera Online High School is a charter high school fully accredited by the North Central Association (NCA) and Commission on International Trans-Regional Accreditation. Primavera has been operational since 2000 and we have graduated hundreds of full-time students throughout the state of Arizona.

Manuel Leyvas came to Primavera Online High School in his freshman year. He had left his traditional classroom high school due to his father's serious medical condition. He knew he was falling behind in his schoolwork, but his family desperately needed his help at home. When Manuel's father had his leg amputated and was no longer able to work, Manuel was faced with having to drop out of school in order to help support his family.

Manuel found Primavera Online High School and was able to complete his high school credits while staying at home to take care of his three younger brothers, cleaning the house and cooking for the family.

Primavera sees thousands of Arizona students each year with stories similar to Manuel's. The progress of Internet technology has given our state the opportunity to serve its students in ways previously thought impossible. Not only are we able to offer a customized education for our full-time students, Primavera Online High School offers any Arizona student the opportunity for credit

recovery and supplemental education through our comprehensive online programs.

During the 2006-2007 school year, 7,542 Arizona students failed to graduate with their senior classes due to incomplete credits, according to the Arizona Department of Education. The value of credit recovery with Primavera Online High School is that the student can select the individual courses he or she needs to graduate on time without having to attend another full year of high school.

Frequently, many students do not re-register for an additional year in their schools and become one of the thousands of Arizona dropouts continuing to plague our educational system.

For students in rural areas who may have limited access to advanced courses, they can now augment the regular offerings of their home district with programs through online courses. In small districts, resources may not be available to hire the "highly qualified" teachers for specialized coursework mandated by the requirements of No-Child-Left-Behind. Primavera Online High School is able to provide advanced science and math courses as well as economics, sociology and character education among others to the rural districts. Now students who would never have had exposure to these courses or would have had to drive miles to attend classes elsewhere can receive coursework and individualized instruction from their own homes.

As a charter school, Primavera Online High School has the hiring flexibility to retain the teachers who are highly performing. This has allowed us to attract the highest



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level full-time staff as well as an unparalleled adjunct faculty. Our students benefit from daily correspondence with their teachers, and our parents are assured that only the highest quality teachers are guiding their children's education.

Our students' stories define the progress we've made in education. Technology has allowed us to bridge gaps of time, space, economics and circumstance. Primavera Online High School this year alone will serve approximately 10,000 Arizona students, including Manuel Leyvas, set to graduate in December. Manuel wants to go on to college next year to study psychology and credits his experience at Primavera for keeping him in school and on-track.

Online education is a giant step in the progress of our education system, the benefits of which go beyond the individual students attending schools like Primavera. We all stand to benefit from finding innovative ways to keep students graduating, becoming leaders in the community and inspiring more progress for the future.

Damian Creamer is the founder of Primavera Online High School.