

Rigorous Courses and Expectations Lead to Success at Ottumwa High School

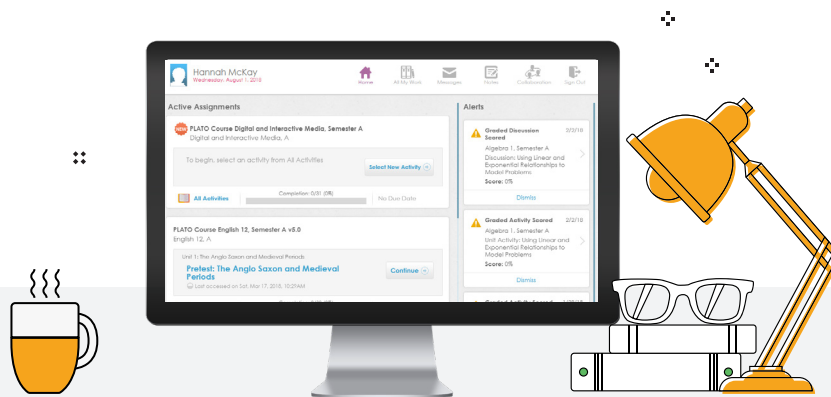


400 students
Grades 9 to 12



Kevin Cochran,
Plato Courseware Administrator

Ottumwa High School in Ottumwa, Iowa has taken online learning and combined it with a Midwestern work ethic to deliver real results for its students. Plato Courseware Administrator Kevin Cochran was brought on three years ago to implement Plato Courseware and administer the OHS online learning program. “I had been running my own business, and had also been coaching for 15 years,” said Cochran. “I was at a point where the coaching led me to want to get more involved with students and their education. Joining Ottumwa High School to work with Plato Courseware was the best career decision I’ve ever made.”



How They Did It

Cochran indicated that there was some initial skepticism among the staff: “For a few, there was a sense that with online courses for credit recovery, you throw a student in, they get their credit, and they get out. The staff saw it as an easy way out. But, once teachers became familiar with the online courses, they really came to understand the rigor and complexity of the courses.” The teachers and students soon came to realize that online learning with Plato Courseware was far from the easy way out. Cochran said that regardless of how courses are delivered, students need to be committed to making the effort in order to succeed. To earn the credit, students must get at least 70 percent overall proficiency.

The teachers have become convinced of the quality of the courses. A biology teacher reported that students tell peers taking the teacher-led class, “You’d better pass this one because the Plato Courseware biology course is harder.”

A mathematics teacher told Cochran that he was impressed by how much course content an Algebra II student already knew after taking the Plato Algebra I course.

Cochran also says that the course-level assessments provide immediate feedback that helps him identify knowledge gaps and helps OHS teachers guide instruction and provide more individualized learning experiences.

As for Plato Courseware customer support, Cochran said it is excellent. He is particularly impressed with the efficiency and excellent follow-up demonstrated by the customer support.

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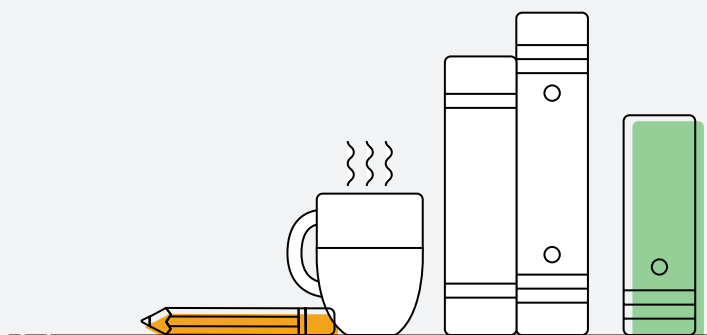
Success

In a school of 1,400 students, almost 400 students recovered credits using Plato Courseware, and 76 seniors in the Plato Courseware program graduated, including many that Cochran said would otherwise not have. In 2010, OHS students recovered a total of 507 credits.

Of course, inside the numbers are the real lives of students. These include one student who, due to poor attendance and a general lack of interest in learning, was at risk of not graduating. But, using Plato Courseware and the alternative learning environment it provides, she earned 12 credits. "She was at risk of not graduating, but it wasn't because of knowledge or skill gaps," Cochran said. "Something just clicked in her when she started using the program. I got a call from her a few months after graduation. She told me she was starting college the next Monday."

The Future

After completing three years with Plato Courseware, OHS renewed its contract. Plato Courseware will be used this summer with about 120 students, and Plato Courseware has been adopted at OHS' alternative school, with about 100 students. "We were excited to renew our contract and are looking forward to continuing to expand our use of Plato Courseware," said Cochran. "For example, we are planning on using Plato Courseware as part of our special education program. That's a new chance for success for another 160 students in Ottumwa."






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