

# Powerful partnership

Hamilton Community Schools teams up with Michigan Virtual to meet every student's needs



[MICHIGANVIRTUAL.ORG](http://MICHIGANVIRTUAL.ORG)

## INTEGRATING STANDARDIZED LEARNING AND INDIVIDUALIZED EDUCATION

When Superintendent David Tebo arrived at Hamilton Community Schools, the district was working to implement standards-based grading. At the same time, teachers and administrators wanted a way to focus on individual students as they mastered (or struggled with) standards.

Given the constraints of the modern classroom, meeting these dueling and seemingly contradictory goals of standardization and individualization presented a significant challenge.



**“Our traditional system gives students education in a time-bound, lock-step process,” Tebo said, noting that all students are expected to learn the same way and at an identical pace. “It’s difficult to individualize learning for kids when we batch them by date of birth. I wanted to change how we did that and allow for the flexibility of our students and our teachers.”**

But the rigid uniformity of traditional education was just one of the hurdles they faced. Expanding classrooms were another.

When Mat Rehkopf, the district’s director of teaching and learning, began his career teaching chemistry 15 years earlier, classes were 16 to 20 students. “Today, you find very few classrooms that don’t have 30 students,” he said. “Think about five periods a day, 30 students per period – when you give an assignment, you have 150 assignments to grade.”

Those numbers make it nearly impossible to provide timely or in-depth feedback, let alone offer personalized student assessment and learning plans.

Tebo and Rehkopf reached out to Michigan Virtual to explore the idea of using blended learning to complement their standards- and competency-based learning goals, and provide more individualized learning.



## INTRODUCING THE PROJECT

Hamilton invited Michigan Virtual to present a professional development session on blended learning.



**Michigan Virtual explained to the teachers this was about meeting kids where they are, it was about taking what they knew about their students through our standards-based grading and building a lesson plan for them that met their individual needs,” Rehkopf said.**

After day three of the training, it was clear to Rehkopf the session was a success. “The teachers told me it was the best professional development they’d ever been a part of and they knew they would use it in their classrooms,” he said.

Deanna Malloch, a seventh-grade English and social studies teacher at Hamilton Middle School, became part of the first cohort. “My teaching partners and I already were using technology in our classroom, so when we were offered the chance, we jumped right on board,” she said.

Malloch and her partners created two blended units for Michigan Virtual as part of their training. One focused on reading “The Outsiders” by S.E. Hinton.

Instead of doing paper-and-pencil quizzes, she created reading checks in Google forms that were graded automatically. She also posted audio links in Google Classroom, so struggling readers could have assigned chapters read to them.

“I’m meeting their needs,” Malloch said, “and I’m following their IEPs by having support in place for them.”

**Based on the enthusiasm and success of Malloch and others in the first cohort, teachers quickly signed up for cohorts two and three. Now, two-thirds of Hamilton’s teachers are implementing the district’s custom blended learning approach.**





## **BENEFITING EVERY STUDENT**

Although Tebo still sees merit in traditional classroom methods, he's quick to point out that those methods don't address the needs of every student.

"We have 2,700 kids who walk through our doors every day, and to think one-size-fits-all education will meet 2,700 needs is pretty short-sighted," he said.

As for offering individualized education, Rehkopf believes blended learning is the only answer. "It's just not possible unless you do something blended, to put them in their proper groups," he said. "I just don't see another way to personalize learning and meet kids where they are."

Sometimes, something as simple as automating quizzes or homework assignments can make a big difference in teachers' ability to offer individualized attention. The time saved affords them the opportunity to assess each student's progress, provide personalized feedback, and develop an individualized learning plan.

**Tebo said partnering with Michigan Virtual was the only way Hamilton Community Schools could make this leap to blended learning.**

"Michigan Virtual helped us flesh this out and create a blended environment in a very thoughtful way that doesn't come from hardware or software or the bright-shiny-technological thing," he said. "It's about the pedagogy around teaching kids in an environment that isn't butts in seats for six-and-a-half hours a day, five days a week. That's not reality anymore."

# Give Your Students *More*

Jumpstart your whole-school virtual learning program with a free review and learn how to leverage today's online learning technology to position students for success in the classroom and beyond.

[Start my review](#)



[MICHIGANVIRTUAL.ORG](http://MICHIGANVIRTUAL.ORG)

920 Municipal Way  
Lansing, MI 48917-6872, USA  
888.532.5806

