

Online Opportunities For Christian Schools

THREE WAYS ONLINE EDUCATION CAN HELP
CHRISTIAN SCHOOLS FULFILL THEIR MISSION



sevenstarTM
Your Online Learning Partner



THE UNIQUE CHALLENGES OF CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

Administrating a Christian school of any size can sometimes feel like a juggling act. You must pay constant attention to the needs of a diverse body of interest groups without losing focus on your financial, educational, and spiritual goals and obligations.

WHOSE NEEDS DO YOU MEET?

- **Students** arrive at your school from a variety of backgrounds. Some have attended your school since kindergarten; others transferred in from public school or other Christian schools, or were home-schooled. Whatever background they come from, students need to feel engaged with their education and prepared to move with confidence into their post-graduation path.
- **Parents** choose to send their children to your school over public and private alternatives for a reason: because of your strong academic reputation, because of your commitment to Christian values, because of your teachers' nurturing approach, or because of your small class sizes. They need to feel like their tuition money is well-spent and their decision to send their children to your school will reap benefits in the long run. They want their children to have access to the same breadth of courses as they would at a public school. They have entrusted you with their children's education and expect you to follow through.
- **Faculty** members went into Christian education because of their dual commitment to aiding the academic and spiritual development of young people. They are willing to work hard but need to feel supported, not overburdened, and that their efforts will not go to waste.

Financial stewardship has always been a cornerstone of Christian school administration. Even the most abundant resources are limited. Every decision you make—to hire a new teacher, to implement a new educational program, to construct new classrooms—must be balanced against a budget. As a private school, you don't have access to the same state resources as your public competitors. Meanwhile, you are always looking at opportunities



to expand your school's educational offerings, staying competitive with public and private alternatives.

Above all is your core mission: enabling the next generation of difference-makers with a sound academic program built on a rock-solid foundation of Christian values.

It can seem overwhelming, but as you know from experience, careful planning and the right tools are the key to making any goal attainable. In the academic world, Christian or otherwise, online learning is both the new frontier and an emerging solution to a number of administrative and educational challenges. For teachers and administrators, online learning can present a scalable, cost-effective method of expanding services and reaching students in situations where it would otherwise be unachievable.

This paper will discuss three opportunities Christian school administrators and educators have in for strengthening their ability to meet their educational, financial, and spiritual goals with online learning programs: credit recovery, Advanced Placement (AP), and out-of-sequence courses. We will end with a brief discussion of what to look for in an online learning partner and the benefits of choosing one that shares your Christian mission.

BACK ON TRACK: HELPING STUDENTS RECOVER LOST CREDIT

Why Credit Recovery

Even with the most talented, dedicated teaching staff, some students do not achieve their highest potential the first time around. When a student fails a class, he or she is faced with the prospect of having to retake it the next semester or school year and falling behind his or her classmates. For the student, it can be as humiliating as it is frustrating.

It is frustrating for educators too. Students who fall behind are a dropout risk. More than that, a school's mission is to educate. Every student who fails a class is a missed opportunity.

In addition to helping struggling students stay on track, credit recovery can also help successful students improve their grades to position themselves for the G.P.A. they desire for college admissions consideration.

Traditional methods of credit recovery include classroom time before, during, and after school, on the weekend, and during the summer. Those options require space and, perhaps more significantly, the availability of teachers and the funds to pay them for their time—resources that are not always readily available to Christian schools. It can be difficult to justify spending money on summer school instruction when only a few students need it. Brick and mortar credit recovery options also require that students fit their class schedules alongside whatever evening, weekend, or summer obligations they have at home, work, or church.



CHALLENGE: *How can a Christian school help struggling students get back on track with a cost-effective credit recovery program that maintains flexibility for maximum student engagement?*

SOLUTION: *Online learning for credit recovery*

WHY ONLINE LEARNING CAN BE THE IDEAL CREDIT RECOVERY TOOL

Educational institutions at all levels have been turning to the internet to supplement and expand their course offerings for well over a decade. More recently, public and private schools have been looking into ways to use online technology to reach at-risk and struggling students and students who learn better outside of the traditional classroom atmosphere. Online learning is increasingly being seen as an ideal tool for credit recovery because it:



- **Is flexible.** Guided by teachers, tutors, or parents, students can fit online instruction into their schedules any number of ways: during computer lab time at school or at home during evenings, weekends, and the summer.
- **Is efficient.** When a student fails a class, it does not necessarily mean he or she did not learn anything. Modern online learning systems avoid needless repetition, and with it, student frustration, by narrowing their focus to just the material the student had not already mastered. This can significantly speed up the time required for credit recovery.
- **Is mobile.** Classroom attendance is not necessary for online credit recovery. Students can complete their work from home or even on the road. Modern online learning tools are accessible with tablets and other mobile devices as well as laptop and desktop computers.
- **Is scalable.** Whether your school has one or 20 students needing to recover credit in a particular subject, online learning makes far fewer demands on your space and teaching resources than traditional credit recovery methods. Instructors can be provided by the online learning partner or you can use your own teachers to facilitate the course.

For Christian schools in particular—which often struggle with access to resources and issues of scalability—online learning provided by a reliable partner is an attractive solution to helping students get back on track when they fail. Students and their families will find the online learning program more convenient than classroom alternatives, faculty will thank you for the decreased workload, and the board of directors will appreciate higher retention rates and the efficient use of funds.

THE COMPETITIVE EDGE: ADVANCED PLACEMENT ONLINE

Why offer advanced placement (AP) courses

Advanced Placement (AP) classes offer the highest achieving students in public and private high schools the opportunity to study certain subjects at the college level. Students, and their parents, seek out AP courses for the academic challenge, for the chance to get a

jumpstart with college credit, and to strengthen their college applications. The College Board certifies courses in a number of different subject areas for AP credit, but offering them all at a Christian high school can be challenging. Large public schools gain a competitive edge among parents with high academic standards because they can offer a wider range of AP courses thanks to their higher enrollment and access to public funding.



CHALLENGE: *How can Christian schools meet parent and student demand for Advanced Placement courses on the small scale without compromising their financial goals?*

SOLUTION: *Advanced Placement courses online.*

HOW CHRISTIAN SCHOOLS USE ONLINE ADVANCED PLACEMENT COURSES

Offering AP courses online enables Christian schools to add depth and breadth to their curriculum and attract and retain families with high academic standards. For example, perhaps your school does not offer an AP calculus course due to lack of interest or financial resources, but one student feels called to a career in science or engineering and her family considers calculus a necessity for acceptance into a leading college program. With an online learning solution, your school could offer that student a flexible, affordable option to take the course without transferring out or setting up complicated relationships with other schools.

Online AP courses work for Christian schools, students, and parents because:

- **Students and their families pay their own tuition.** Typically, schools provide access to the online course, but students and their families pay the fee. Under some arrangements, the family also pays an extra fee that can help a school pay for other programs.
- **It is in line with educational goals.** Christian schools strive to offer all their students



a well-rounded and rigorous education. Offering an expanded range of AP courses online helps them achieve that with their most gifted students.

- **Students can get a jumpstart.** AP exams are held in May. Online learning is flexible and allows schools to set their own start and end dates for an AP course. That means students can start as early as June learning the material for the next year's exams, giving them several more months to prepare and increasing their chance of securing college credit for their efforts.

Online learning puts Christian schools on equal footing with their public counterparts with Advanced Placement course offerings.

THE RIGHT TIME, THE RIGHT PACE: RESOLVING SCHEDULE CONFLICTS WITH ONLINE LEARNING

Traditional classroom learning naturally requires that students follow a strict schedule. That method has worked for the majority of students for a very, very long time. The problem with a traditional course sequence, however, is it doesn't leave much room for students to structure a course around the other time demands in their lives or their ideal learning pace.

How can a traditional learning program fulfill the needs of a student who:

- **Needs** to retake a class, but does not want to be held back?
- **Wants** to—and has the ability to—advance faster than his or her peers?
- **Wants** to get ahead so he or she can go on a mission trip, travel, participate in a sport, or act in a play?
- **Needs** to fulfill a graduation requirement by earning credits in a course that will not be offered again?
- **Needs** to earn a certain credit or amount of credit for your school's entrance requirements?
- **Is** transferring from another school?
- **Is** in eighth or ninth grade and needs extra preparation for the rigors of high school?

Here, too, Christian schools face problems of scale. Traditional teaching resources might

not meet the needs of the students.



CHALLENGE: *How can Christian schools provide a quality education to students whose schedules or learning styles conflict with the traditional course sequence?*

SOLUTION: *Offer out-of-sequence courses online.*

To Christian schools looking for ways to fit their teaching mission alongside the demands of a modern student's busy life, online learning provides unprecedented flexibility. Modern online learning solutions allow students to:

- **Start** any week of the year.
- **Study** from anywhere that has an internet connection using a desktop, laptop, or tablet computer.
- **Work** at their own pace.

Christian schools that choose to invest in online learning classes recognize that traditional teaching methods do not always work for their unique student population. High-quality, rigorous courses are now available online for students at every academic level.

WHAT CHRISTIAN SCHOOLS SHOULD LOOK FOR IN AN ONLINE LEARNING PARTNER

As discussed in this paper, online learning can, among other things, be a solution for Christian schools that want to help their students recover lost credit, offer Advanced Placement courses, and meet the learning needs of students with schedule conflicts. Typically, online courses are provided to a school by a third-party partner. Depending on the arrangement, schools provide oversight of the students while the online learning

partner delivers course content through a web-based portal.

Christian schools have unique requirements for online learning. If your Christian school is considering implementing an online learning program, what should you look for in a partner?

- **A partner that shares your Christian commitment.** First and foremost among your priorities as an educator is to encourage your students in their relationships with Christ. For you and your colleagues, education is a God-given mission to prepare students to serve Him in whatever path they follow. You would not expect less from your faculty members, and you should not expect less from your online learning partners.
- **A partner with an extensive course catalog.** An ideal partner relationship is one that grows over time. Look for an online learning provider that offers all the courses you're looking for, as well as ones you might want in the future.
- **A partner with biblically integrated courses.** Every online course has a worldview coded into it by the developer. Since students engage with online courses without the live guidance of a teacher in a classroom, they may be more susceptible to false beliefs portrayed as fact. Therefore, biblical integration portraying God's truth is more critical in online courses. Sevenstar, for example, uses Christian educators with more than 500 years of combined professional experience to update and upgrade the curriculum to bring in their expertise in teaching a Christ-centered worldview. This year-long process for each course incorporates the wisdom and experience of pastors, theologians, college professors and Christian school leaders at all levels.
- **A partner staffed by certified and experienced professional educators.** Even though your online course offerings are provided by a third party, consider them an extension of your school. You want your students to get as much out of their online courses as they do from your trusted faculty. Before choosing an online learning partner, ask who prepared the lessons and their qualifications. Make sure they're up to your standards for educators.
- **A partner that will certify and allow your teachers to facilitate online courses for**

your students when it makes sense. In some cases, the student is better served and your brand is further integrated into your online program when your teachers are trained to be certified to facilitate for your students.

- **A partner that allows you to brand and customize your online environment.**

Schools and families can connect with online courses from a wide range of providers at a wide range of prices, including free. Schools that wish to present a cohesive, comprehensive strategy to their stakeholders and the local and global community desire their online program to be an extension of their brand.

Otherwise, they become agents for other virtual schools and online providers, each of which is actually a competitor many ways. In fact, some accrediting bodies are requiring that schools standardize and brand their online options to protect accreditation.

- **A partner with the highest-quality, standards-based courses.** Few online providers can match Sevenstar on rigor, adherence to common core standards, and the degree to which we exceed U.S. national standards and recommendations.

- **A partner with a fully accredited school.** Your online course options are an extension of your school's academic program. If academic rigor and college preparation is important to your families, partnering to provide online options that match or raise the bar, academically, will strengthen your school's position in the community. Sevenstar has been reviewed by the highest levels of approving agencies and our online school has been fully accredited since 2007. This enables schools that are not yet accredited to graduate students with a diploma from an accredited school. Sevenstar's online school is accredited by North Central Association Commission on Accreditation and School Improvement (NCA CASI) through AdvancED.

- AdvancED is the unified organization of the North Central Association Commission on Accreditation and School Improvement (NCA CASI) and the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Council on Accreditation and School Improvement (SACS CASI).
- AdvancED is dedicated to advancing excellence in education worldwide through accreditation, research, and professional services.

- Through AdvancED, NCA CASI and SACS CASI have defined shared, research-based accreditation standards that cross state, regional, and national boundaries. Accompanying these standards is a unified, clear and powerful accreditation process designed to help schools continuously improve.

SEVENSTAR: AN ONLINE LEARNING SOLUTION FOR CHRISTIAN SCHOOLS

If you are a Christian school principal or administrator and you are thinking about implementing an online learning program at your school, we invite you to consider Sevenstar as your trusted partner in Christian education.

Sevenstar exists to help schools and families worldwide deliver high-quality Christian education to students. We have more than 100 courses for grades six through twelve, as well as over 200 dual credit courses from leading Christian colleges and universities. Sevenstar desires to glorify Christ and encourages students to learn how to process information and think critically in the context of a Biblical worldview. Our courses are rigorous and exceed all national standards and recommendations.

We provide school partners with access to:

- An online platform for developing and delivering online content.
- Online courses built to teach a Christian worldview and develop critical thinking as followers of Jesus Christ.
- Christian teachers who facilitate our online courses.
- Coaching services to guide partnering schools through implementing our program.



For more information on how Sevenstar can help your Christian school get started with online learning, [click here](#) or call us at 513-612-1029.