

White Paper: Innovation and Education

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This series of white papers is designed to help educators and parents see what is happening in education today where new, innovative approaches to teaching, integrating a broad array of tools and techniques, is just plain working. Please send us your thoughts and areas you would like us to discuss in our white paper series.

Kahn Academy: Discovering how to connect with today's kids

Like it or not, today's kids are a gaming generation. As educators, we need to use that to our advantage and create learning experiences that are game-based in our quest to create 21st century schools. [Khan Academy](#) does just.

The best part about Khan is that it is FREE! Khan offers a library of over 2,700 videos covering everything from math and finance to physics and the humanities, as well as 276 practice exercises. The videos are short and engaging, and more are continually being posted. [Salman Kahn](#) himself teaches each lesson, speaking in an easy-to-understand manner and using effective colors to draw attention to detail. Students then can work through practice exercises and get assessments.

Students work at their pace, getting help and rewards

Ingeniously, the format creates a self-paced program and ways to access help when needed. No longer do students need to practice something they already know or move beyond a concept they have not mastered yet. Each problem takes students step by step through a concept until it is mastered and offers a hint if a little help is needed. Student engagement is high because they win badges for speed, watching videos and tackling difficult material. Friendly competition can be created by viewing class stats in real time.

Teachers love Kahn Academy, too

For teachers as well, Kahn Academy is a terrific resource because we can set goals for students to work towards, or better yet, students can set goals for themselves, creating a lifetime learning opportunity. You can assign yourself as a coach and check for progress.

Khan also provides review. Once a student has mastered a topic, he or she is always asked to do several review questions to make sure the information is being retained.

The proof is in the pudding: engaged learners

This summer, I began seeing Khan Academy used during a special education program. The middle school team had a group of twenty 6th-8th graders performing significantly below grade level. The teachers were looking for a way to engage the students differently than with just paper and pencil, since this wasn't working.

After setting up a Khan account for each of the students using Gmail (each

student in our district has a Google Apps For Education account), students were off using iPads. Each class began with a Khan video on a topic they were studying, then students would practice. Teachers could instantly see results on their coaching roster. They could see exactly where a difficulty was occurring and remediate specifically. Students were given the incentive of earning a small prize if they won certain badges. The ‘buy-in’ factor became clear when over half of the students were doing Khan at night independently, after a long day of summer school. It was even more evident when they returned from vacation and had continued to work on Khan independently.

The result? We are creating lifelong learners!

Rachel Carney is an eighth grade special education teacher who has worked in private and public school settings. Rachel currently co-teaches in language arts and social studies classes, as well as teaching reading, writing, and math supplemental support classes in New Hampshire. She holds a master’s degree in special education from Fairfield University. Rachel is part of the Professional Development Committee, as well as the coordinator of the special education summer school program for preschool through high school students in New Hampshire.