

PIEDMONT CITY SCHOOL DISTRICT

PIEDMONT MIDDLE SCHOOL

CHANGING RURAL STUDENTS' FUTURES WITH RELEVANT,
ENGAGING LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES

KEY FEATURES:

- ✓ Complete Redesign
- ✓ Flipped Classroom, Individual Rotation, Flex Blended Model
- ✓ Competency-Based Learning
- ✓ Project-Based and Experiential Learning
- ✓ Higher Education and Community Partnerships

AT A GLANCE:

Start Date: Fall 2014
Grades Served: 6-8
Location: Piedmont, AL
Operator: Piedmont City School District
Operator Type: District
Setting: Rural
Students at Start: 275
Students at Capacity: 290

MODEL TOOLBOX:

Learning Management System:
Blackboard, Ed Elements

Student Information System:
STI's InformationNOW, Ed Elements

Gradebook: Blackboard, Mastery Connect

Assessment Tools and Approaches: Mastery Connect

Implementation Partner: Ed Elements

Digital Content Providers:
Compass Odyssey, IXL Math, TenMarks, Classworks, Think Through Math, Discovery Ed, Brain Pop, Study Island, No Red Ink, Stride Academy, Global Scholar, Mathalicious, Reflex Math, iStation

Hardware: Macbook Air

“Piedmont Middle School will challenge the status quo for what a successful rural district school can look like.”

MATT AKIN, SUPERINTENDENT, PIEDMONT CITY SCHOOL DISTRICT

The Vision: Piedmont City School District is a high-performing district that launched the “mPower Piedmont” initiative in 2010 to create citywide wireless Internet access, provide laptops to every student, and invest in digital content. The efforts improved state assessment scores. Even though graduates were well-prepared, many remained in poverty due to limited opportunities in the region or limited exposure to college and career options. A Gallup poll of students revealed that their sense of hope, engagement, and well-being was troublingly low.

District leaders decided to create a new school and community culture filled with hope and opportunity through “mBolden Piedmont” by re-designing teaching and learning with the now available technology, starting in middle school. They wanted to provide a more enriched educational experience, increasing exposure to careers and college through career immersions and global project-based learning opportunities.

The personalized, blended learning school model fosters students’ ability to set and achieve goals, solve problems, and develop important non-cognitive skills like grit and tenacity.

The Academic Model:

Advanced Mastery: Piedmont expects students to master state standards through hands-on projects, original creations, and experiments, not just multiple-choice tests. Teachers guide students to advance through standards using adaptive digital content at an individual pace while demonstrating deeper

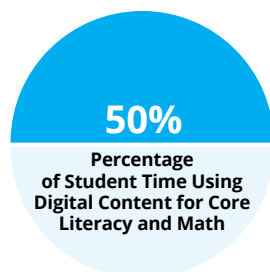
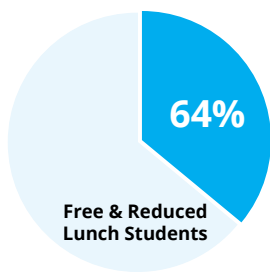
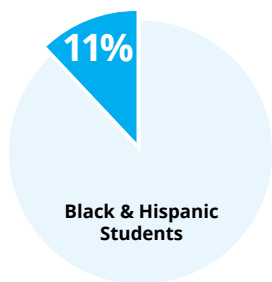
understanding of core concepts through interdisciplinary projects and performance assessments. The curriculum is not bound by grade levels or seat time.

Relevance: The school also emphasizes relevant learning experiences and connections to people in the local community and beyond, drawing a direct line to students’ futures. Students might share a new robot design with a grad student at Jacksonville State University or present a strategic plan to local business leaders for improving Main Street. And students take surveys regularly to discover career interests; teachers then create learning opportunities relevant to each student’s life goals.

Student Ownership: With 24/7 citywide Internet access and devices for each student, anytime, anyplace learning is a reality for all students. During Class Time, students have control over their learning pace and they have choice in demonstrating mastery through digital content and project-based learning.

Students self-direct their learning during My Time, a daily flex block for independent learning that can be used for remediation, content mastery, advanced mastery, project completion, and career exploration. Students work off of action plans they make during Goal Time.

Students meet in small teams during Goal Time (aka Team Time) with a teacher who serves as their mentor/advisor throughout middle school. Students set short and long-term goals, experience hands-on



BLENDED SUBJECTS:
Math, English/Language Arts, Science, Social Studies

BY THE NUMBERS:

- Year 1 public revenue per pupil: \$6,893
- Year 1 expenses per pupil: \$7,251
- Year 4 revenue per pupil: \$7,346
- Year 4 expenses per pupil: \$7,209
- Years to sustainability: 4

learning, and interact with college students, professors, or working professionals.

The Organizational Model: The school has taken a phased approach to implementing its redesign. Through ongoing professional development, each subject-area teaching team is building expertise in one aspect of the model each year over three years.

Teachers spend about half of daily My Time analyzing student data with their grade level teams and they participate in bi-weekly professional development sessions on small group instruction, one-to-one instruction, project-based learning, and data

analysis.

In partnership with Jacksonville State University, Piedmont is [creating a corps of blended learning teachers](#) for Piedmont and surrounding districts. Under the guidance of master teachers, student teachers benefit from year-long, hands-on training in the district’s blended model.

The Operator: The district is located in a small community of 5,000 residents in northeast Alabama and serves about 1,200 students in the region. After three years of phasing in the mBolden model at the middle school, it will be scaled up to the high school and down to the elementary school. Middle school teachers will

serve as the core group of trainers for district-wide professional development.

As a member of the Digital Promise League of Innovative Schools and Verizon Innovative Learning Schools as well as a founding member of the Alabama-based Collaborative Regional Education (CORE) initiative, Piedmont has multiple networks through which to disseminate best practices across the state and country. Piedmont City School District recognizes it can become a national model of innovation for rural schools and districts—the kind of districts that serve the majority of students in over half the states.

PHASED IMPLEMENTATION

		YEAR 1	YEAR 2	YEAR 3	
CLASS TIME 	Teacher Expertise: Areas of model where grade level teaching teams are experts	1	2	3	Expansion to 5 th Grade
	Advanced Mastery: Phases of implementation of competency-based, project-based learning	Projects as assessment	Projects as learning	Refine the model	
GOAL TIME 	Partnerships: Grades supported by relationships with hometown professionals and colleges	Grade 8	Grades 7, 8	Grades 6, 7, 8	Expansion to 9 th Grade
	Exploratories: Number of class-based and online Exploratories offered	4	8	12	
MY TIME 	Flex Time: Percent of time spent in My Time	20%	35%	50%	
	Digital Content: Number of providers teachers use	2-4	3-5	4-6	

To manage the redesign of an existing school, Piedmont has a three-year plan. For Class Time, teachers build their expertise in one area of the model each year, starting with either project-based learning, integrating digital content, or effective advisory time. To rollout competency-based projects in Class Time, focusing on advanced mastery, teachers began by identifying critical standards for learning and are gradually implementing the significant pedagogical shifts required by the model—starting with projects as assessment. Resulting interdisciplinary project-based opportunities evolve by subject area and by the depth of the project. The School is phasing in key elements of Goal Time and My Time in similar ways.

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

School URL: <http://www.piedmontmiddle.org/>
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