



Helping SPED Students Soar with IXL

Black Canyon High School, Emmett, Idaho



"IXL has revolutionized my classroom. Even my lowest-level students are able to be successful when working in IXL. And the skills they are mastering and the rate at which they are learning is truly amazing."

Annette Lutes, High School Special Education Teacher

At Black Canyon High School in Emmett, Idaho, special education teacher Annette Lutes needed to find an easier way to assess student learning and deliver individualized instruction in a classroom with a broad range of ability levels. With IXL, she can meet students where they are and empower them to work independently towards mastery of skills they will need for success beyond the classroom. Now, Annette's students are achieving multiple-grade level gains and she's consistently amazed by their progress and dedication to learning.

Finding a Flexible Solution for the SPED Classroom

Annette is a 25-year special education veteran who teaches students with autism, cognitive disabilities, and other impairments that significantly impact their ability to learn and succeed in school. She has a self-contained SPED classroom serving 10-15 students in grades 9-12 each year, each with highly individual learning challenges. "Not one student is at the same level," Annette says. "I have students operating anywhere from a pre-K level to a sixth or seventh grade level, depending on the subject."

Even with differentiated instruction, Annette found that standard high school curricula did not offer enough flexibility to meet the variety of needs in her classroom. She found herself scavenging for materials at different levels and trying to cobble together a cohesive curriculum for each student. This approach was time consuming and challenging since Annette's students could be left with unfilled gaps in their skills development.

In 2013, Annette instituted a one-to-one tablet program for her students. She saw this as an opportunity to look for digital resources that could help her differentiate instruction for all of her students and automate some of the required assessment, grading, and tracking. After some research, she discovered IXL.

She began using IXL Math and IXL English Language Arts on a trial basis in her classroom at the end of the 2013-2014 school year. The trial was so successful that she sought and won a grant to fund IXL for all of her students the following year.



A Personalized Curriculum for Every Student

IXL allows Annette to deliver truly individualized instruction to her students, while simplifying planning, data collection, and classroom management. Each student can work in the program at his or her own level and pace.

Students access IXL on the iPads provided in the school's one-to-one program. Annette loves that her students are able to work independently. "They can just grab their iPad, click on IXL and get started," she says. IXL's clean, easy interface works well for her students. "There are no ads or other visual distractions, which is a real benefit for my kids," she notes.

Annette uses IXL Math and IXL English Language Arts as a core curriculum in her classroom. Students typically work on IXL up to 35 minutes each day in each subject. She also uses IXL Science and IXL Social Studies to supplement her instruction in those subjects.

Students work through IXL English Language Arts sequentially at their own pace and reading level. In math, Annette focuses on functional skills that her students will need to be more independent outside the classroom, such as time, money, basic computation, geometry, and charts and graphs. She uses the IXL Real-Time Diagnostic to find each student's current mastery level. Each day of the week, students focus on a different set of skills, working on practice problems in IXL that are targeted to their skill level. "We may all be working on money, but some students are working at a pre-K level and some students are working on more advanced skills," she explains. "If they finish the money skills, I have them work on related skills such as adding and subtracting with decimals."

Annette says IXL challenges her students without frustrating them. "If I teach a whole-class lesson, I'll have some on board but it will be over a lot of their heads. I can never reach the right level for every kid," she says. "IXL does that for me." She says classroom management is easier with IXL, because her students all stay focused while working in the program.

She also loves the reports she gets with IXL Analytics. "Everything we do in special education is driven by data," she says. "I have to do progress monitoring and develop IEPs based on performance data. With IXL, gathering the data I need is automatic. It really saves a lot of time." Annette uses the Live Classroom report to monitor how students are doing during class so she can intervene before students get frustrated.

"IXL is a lifesaver in special education. Instead of spending hundreds of hours grading papers and collecting data for IEPs and progress reports, I can just go to IXL and it's all right there."

Annette Lutes, High School Special Education Teacher



Watching Students Achieve More with IXL

Over the 2017-2018 school year, the 11 students in Annette's class have spent more than 1,500 hours in IXL and answered more than 223,000 questions. And all of that hard work is paying off—Annette is seeing her students make more progress than she had ever hoped for. "They are learning things that I never would have even tried to teach a few years ago," she says. "IXL definitely has pushed them to tackle more advanced and complex skills."

She is seeing the proof in her students' scores in IXL and on other tests. Most of her students have made multiple grade-level gains in each year working in the program. One of her students started at the preschool level in math four years ago, and is now working on 6th grade skills. That's why Annette says she'll never go back to worksheets. "In special education, you usually feel lucky if you can just help students get a full year's growth each year and not fall further behind," Annette says. "Seeing them actually close the gap is really phenomenal."

A Model for Success at Black Canyon High School

Here's how high school teacher Annette Lutes is using IXL in her self-contained special education classroom:

- Students access IXL on iPads provided as part of the school's one-to-one technology program.
- She uses IXL Math and IXL English Language Arts as her core curriculum. Students work at their own level and pace in the program.
- Students are expected to achieve a SmartScore (IXL's proprietary scoring system that measures how well a student understands a skill) of 100 before moving on to the next level. This ensures that they have truly mastered the skill.
- Students are motivated to earn "Cougar Cash" (coupons they can spend in the school store) for time spent and skills mastered on IXL. While her students are competitive, they also celebrate each other's successes.
- Students like to monitor their own progress in IXL and print out certificates to take home to share with their parents.
- Annette uses reports from IXL Analytics to monitor classroom performance. The Live Classroom report helps her intervene immediately when students are struggling or frustrated.
- She uses data from IXL Analytics to complete required paperwork (such as progress reports and IEPs) for the special education program. Student scores in IXL are also used for report cards.