CASE STUDY: OAK PARK HIGH SCHOOL

Introduction: Expanding CS Opportunities

Oak Park High School (OPHS), located in Oak Park, CA, contains a student population of 1,600. In 2016, OPHS was ranked 51st in Newsweek Magazine’s national list of top schools, and 7th in the state of California. Twelve years ago, OPHS realized that offering computer science would become an integral part of their school’s curricular success, opting to utilize the advanced technological expertise of teacher Erik Amerikaner. To date, Amerikaner has taught Information Technology courses for 18 years, developing tech curriculum for the state of California as well as writing textbooks for McGraw-Hill/Glencoe and Wiley & Sons.

Five years ago, Amerikaner began to teach an AP Computer Science A course, using a Java textbook. “The textbook purchase was an investment for our school – it set us back about $4,000. About a month
into the course, I realized that all of the students were doing extremely well on their coding activities. It wasn’t long until I realized that university students somewhere had posted the entire textbook, including quizzes and exams, online. I threw it out after that year, thinking that I had to come up with something better,” he described. After a bit of research, Amerikaner found Edhesive. Following an initial conversation with an Edhesive school program manager, the teacher realized that the AP CSA course was exactly what OPHS needed. Over the years, Amerikaner has built OPHS’s Information Technology program from the ground up to a current offering of Intro CS (Python) and AP CSA with Edhesive, as well as a Microsoft certification program, web design, and a CISCO Academy.

**Implementation and Success at Oak Park High School**

In the first year with Edhesive, Amerikaner had 20 students in his class. Today, he has 60 students in two sections. “There were over 200 students who wanted to take the course, and 150 signed up. We had to tell most to come back next year, limiting it to juniors and seniors only.” With an involved group of parents who understand the necessity of a tech background, many students at OPHS are involved in both Amerikaner’s tech classes and the afterschool Robotics program. “Each student in my computer science world is on a different level. The Edhesive model allows them to move at their own pace, working on their own schedules. The students seem to like it very much,” relays Amerikaner. The online component offers freedom to students who need to work one step at a time, going back to watch videos, read lessons, and complete coding activities as much as needed until they’re ready to move forward. Amerikaner also appreciates the ability to track his students’ work in real time. “If I see that a student has only put in 20 minutes of work during a 90 minute class period, I can address the issue. I can also track work outside of class time and offer extra encouragement.”

Even as an experienced tech teacher, Amerikaner uses Edhesive. “It works for me. The grade reports and tracking resources are invaluable. Edhesive frees me up to work with the kids during our class time, or even further my own knowledge. Edhesive really makes the students the learners, putting them in charge.” Amerikaner emphasizes the values of a real job in the tech world in his classroom, encouraging students to work together and save their work often. “Understanding the frustration of technology is half of the learning curve. Sometimes the machines won’t work, and they have to learn how to deal with it. If a computer doesn’t turn on, the student can go to another machine. If they lose a bit of code without backing it up, it’s a lesson. They learn when to work independently and when to ask for help.”

Being located in the hub of technology in Southern California is a large benefit for OPHS students, allowing many of them to participate in tech internships over the summer. “The real-world application of Edhesive’s resources sets students up for the reality of a real workplace. The value of Edhesive is that students are given the opportunity to solve problems independently or collaboratively, as needed.” With their programming skills, one student interned with Facebook, working on building applications. Another student interned with Pixar.
"We need people from the computer science world to teach in high schools," expresses Amerikaner, "but professionals don’t have an interest in leaving the industry to teach after logging 5,000 hours of experience. Edhesive allows teachers to incorporate advanced curriculum regardless of their experience level." Amerikaner believes that offering CS courses at the high school level is important for students’ success. "The kids should have a basic understanding of what tech is all about. I’ve had seniors with no tech experience jump into AP CSA. For the first month, they are lost, and then all of a sudden, a light bulb goes on. They’re into it. Edhesive works."

Outcomes at Oak Park High School

- OPHS now offers two Edhesive courses, AP CSA and Intro CS (Python), in addition to several other CS offerings.
- Students are put in charge of their own learning with Edhesive, gaining real world experience through critical thinking and collaborative learning.
- Many students at OPHS have held tech internships over the summer, at both Facebook and Pixar.

Highlights for Teachers

- Experienced tech teachers will still find value in Edhesive’s reporting, teacher resources, and online curriculum.
- Keeping track of students in real time is easy, as the online system tracks the amount of time each student has spent in the online course.
- Tech classes teach students the realities of working with machines, including occasional unreliability and the need to frequently save work.

Edhesive makes online learning accessible, personal, and meaningful. We combine online instruction from nationally recognized experts with the personal support of local teachers, who offer students face-to-face guidance and support.

Ready to find out what’s possible for your school? Email us at info@edhesive.com today.