

CASE STUDY

Utah State Board of Education
and Desert Hills High School
St. George, Utah



Utah's Microsoft Imagine Academy program builds career pathways for students and teachers across schools statewide

Desert Hills High School, St. George, Utah

<http://getintoitnow.com/infotech>

Number of students
1,700+

Number of faculty
67

Number of staff
32

Location
Utah, United States

Customer profile

Excellence for each student entails a robust career pathway anchored in computer science and information technology (IT) at Desert Hills High School. Lifelong learning and real-world skills are imperatives for employment and continuing education opportunities in the evolving field of IT.

Students gain proficiency through technical instruction in the classroom, experiential learning in the laboratory, work experiences from internships, and industry readiness through skills and certification. Other pertinent skills such as teamwork, problem solving, communication skills, and societal and ethical issues awareness are central to their high-quality IT education.

Services

Microsoft Imagine Academy and Certification

Overview

Accelerating high quality education, equity, and student well-being are some of the guiding values of learning innovation for the state of Utah. In 2013, with a vision for making a lasting impact on student success, the state aimed to equip every student with industry-recognized skills and certifications to give them the edge for an unpredictable workforce future.

The Utah State Board of Education partnered with Microsoft to scale its career and technical education resources. Microsoft Imagine Academy (MSIA) program memberships were secured, and included relevant technology curriculum to prepare students for their Microsoft Office certification exam. The state also purchased Microsoft Office Suite licenses in each school with the memberships. This was an important part of the implementation, using the suite with the relevant curriculum for high schools across the state.

With Microsoft's help, the MSIA program was deployed. Teachers were trained on how to help students advance quickly and learn the skills holistically through hands-on and online experiences. Utah's program implementation enabled the students to thrive in more than 150 campuses and schools. The program recently expanded to middle schools, and for schools such as Desert Hills High School in St. George, Utah, the investment and results have exceeded their expectations.

Education needs

Utah's goals to accelerate learning were threefold: First, to provide students with recognized skills and credentials as a career pathway to the workforce and/or higher education. Second, to equip both students and teachers with industry-recognized skills and certifications. And third, to advocate for strategic IT resources and curriculum that can be supported throughout the state.

With over 1700 students currently enrolled at Desert Hills—and incoming students with varied skills—teaching technology in a meaningful way can be challenging. Utah's MSIA program equips its teachers with skills and resources to take on that challenge.

Solution

Providing students with access to high-quality, rigorous career-focused programs that result in attainment of credentials with labor market value is a high priority for Utah. According to Brandon Jacobson, IT Education Specialist for the Utah State Board of Education, every student in Utah can gain the confidence needed to prepare them for the next step. Their Digital Studies curriculum, for instance, aligns to the MSIA Digital Literacy curriculum and certificate and Microsoft Office (MOS) and Microsoft Technology Associate (MTA) curriculum and certification, which helps advance knowledgeable IT users to become computationally literate creators. The state's original goal was for 10-15% of students to take the class and earn their certification, increasing by 50% each year. As of 2018, 30% of students in the state have earned their MOS and MTA certifications (over 17,000 certifications just this year), and of those, 75% (up to 97% at some schools) receive one or more credentials.

Linda Brown, a 21-year teacher veteran—who has been leading IT education at Desert Hills since 2010, also understands the value of certification for her students. “They have to have a way of standing out from all the other kids,” says Brown. Everybody knows computers, but what do they really know? MSIA is a pathway to certification, so students know what comes next. If they want a career in this, then they need these certifications. The thing that’s helped with employability the most is that I have them on a path to certification.”

Individualized instruction

Inspiring students with her love for computing, Brown teaches courses in computer programming, web development, PC repair, networking, information security, and gaming development.

MSIA at Desert Hills has provided Brown with the much-needed endorsements that allow her to teach classes that are currently unavailable in other district schools. Endorsements enable Brown to teach industry-recognized IT skills, which helps get her students career-ready and allows her to

tailor learning to the individual needs of her students.

Teachers have been instrumental in the lives of Desert Hills students, and with MSIA, they have been able to flourish by tapping into its benefits. Brown, for example, has used the MSIA videos and curriculum to build her own skills and credentials. In fact, she’s one of 85% of teachers in Utah who teach Digital Literacy and advanced IT skills that have one or more certifications. Brown has 12 industry certifications.

“MSIA has put our students and teachers on a path to success,” says Brandon Jacobson. “The path to certification gives our students a sense of confidence as well as the skills they need to be employed. Our teachers can ensure that each student is working at the right speed and level, and just as important, MSIA gives them their own track for professional development. It’s gratifying for everyone involved to see our students set up to make a positive impact on the workforce and society.”

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Brandon Jacobson
IT Education Specialist for the Utah State Board of Education

Work- and life-ready skills

For Desert Hills senior Raymond Nelson, 17, MSIA has allowed him a path to excel beyond classroom learning.

“When I came into high school, I was really into computers and mainly computer

repair,” Nelson shares. “Mrs. Brown helped me get started there, and I learned about networking later. Now I’m into Networking and Information Security. I can use MSIA outside of class, so when I want to learn more, I can. It’s all there in one place, and I don’t have to go searching around the internet. It’s all reliable, which is really helpful.”

Nelson’s personal and professional opportunities kickstart with the Navy in June 2019. Afterwards, he plans on securing a job in the computer science and IT industry.

“All these certifications I’ve earned have given me a baseline,” he explains, “so I can learn more easily and know what I’m talking about. This summer I had a school internship, I worked for the district, and I helped set up close to a thousand computers. Now I’m an intern at Printer Logic, and they just offered me a paid internship next semester.” He attributes his success in getting his internship to his MSIA teachers, classes, and industry certification.

According to Brown, MSIA has made the difference between just teaching students like Nelson computer skills, and giving them confidence, essential life skills, and employability acumen.

“I feel like this curriculum has helped my kids get to the point where they have confidence in their skills,” she says. “I feel like it’s valid, and I can trust it. More than anything, I love the fact that I can take a kid—no matter what his or her skill level is—and never run out of curriculum to give them. I can always challenge them. There’s always something more advanced and I can find it easily. Nobody is sitting bored in class, ever.”

All Certification Metrics (MOS/MTA/MCE):	EOY 2016/2017	EOY 2017/2018
Total Exams Administered	30,675	31,947
Total Certifications	17,556	17,878
Total Student Exams Administered	29,839	31,462
Total Student Certifications	17,088	17,650
Total Teacher Exams Administered	836	485
Total Teacher Certifications	468	228