Clark County School District

Successful career-based education

Clark County School District uses Adobe® Creative Suite® Master Collection to arm high school students with marketable digital communications skills and improve student achievement.

The neon lights and vibrant nightlife are typical reminders of Las Vegas. But beyond the nightclubs, hotels, and casinos is a community of more than 1.8 million residents populating the areas of Clark County that surround the famous city. Within Clark County is the United States' fifth-largest school district, spanning more than 350 schools and serving over 306,000 K-12 students.

As one of only 17 school districts statewide, Clark County School District reaches a broad cross-section of neighborhoods spread throughout the greater Las Vegas area. The district features an eclectic mix of traditional elementary, middle, and high schools, as well as specialized career and technical academies. With a diverse population and varied ties to local businesses and industries, the academies play an integral role in helping the district educate students and prepare them for life after graduation.

"We've reached out to local business leaders and found they want graduates who are highly skilled in business communications and technical software," says Donna Levy, coordinator at Clark County School District’s Career and Technical Education-Information and Media Technology department. "Adobe Creative Suite Master Collection software helps equip students with the right skills to succeed after graduation."
Immersive, technology-based learning

Unlike traditional high schools that offer numerous extracurricular activities in addition to customary curriculums, Clark County’s career and technical academies offer more intensive, comprehensive academic programs aimed at helping students develop highly marketable skills to use immediately upon graduation.

While a few academies cater to specific industries or trades, the academies are known for providing well-rounded educational programs to prepare students for careers in video production, entertainment, culinary arts, hospitality management, and more. Students attending academies carry full course loads beyond traditional education. In the digital media and design academy programs for example, in addition to core courses in math, science, and English, students enroll in a variety of graphics and animation, video development, and game design courses that commonly use Adobe software.

“Our curriculums are fully integrated throughout the academies,” says Levy. “Core courses enable students to develop basic skills in math and language, while program-area courses using Adobe Creative Suite Master Collection software provide the foundation for the graphics, animation, video, and design skills students will need in their professional roles.”

The combination of traditional core classes and specialty tracks help academies cater to students’ various interests. For example, the Southwest Career and Technical Academy (SWCTA)—a public school in its third year of operation—has 1,400 students enrolled in 11 different program areas. The school is divided into two smaller learning communities, the Design Academy and the Professional Services Academy.

Within the Design Academy, SWCTA students participate in programs designed for entertainment, engineering, fashion design, video game design, and web design. The Professional Services Academy (PSA) focuses on culinary arts; hospitality, travel and tourism; automotive technology; respiratory therapy; dental assisting; and nursing assistant programs.

SWCTA employs Adobe Creative Suite software throughout its core and specialty program classes. “Students use Adobe software to design and develop project-based learning assignments such as websites and mobile apps for real-world clients in the Las Vegas area,” says Cindi Chang, website design and development instructor at SWCTA. “They learn valuable real-world project management and development skills—using Adobe Photoshop, Illustrator, and Dreamweaver—required for success in whichever path they choose after high school.”

Typically, SWCTA students use Photoshop to create their images and Illustrator to design the wireframe for their site designs. Adobe Photoshop or Illustrator are used to create the mock-up of the sites, and Dreamweaver enables students to rapidly code their site prototypes and prepare them for completion. Recently, development students have begun using HTML5 to create a mobile app for a client and will provide mobile options for other clients in the future.
Career and Technical Education (CTE) programs like the one at SWCTA immerse students in a technology-rich curriculum in which they use PCs, Apple iMacs, and laptops. Juniors and seniors are provided with the latest devices such as iPod Touch and iPad devices to access supplementary learning material, digital content and lessons, teacher and student-created podcasts, textbooks, teacher websites, and digital collaboration forums.

In addition to the hands-on classes, students attending SWCTA participate in a multitude of service-learning projects, job-shadowing, and internship opportunities where they can apply the skills learned in class, as well as take advantage of the ability to earn up to 21 college credits and a variety of CTE certifications.

Craig Statucki, program leader for digital game development at SWCTA, is one of several faculty members sitting on panels that are working with the state of Nevada to formalize the certification process for high school students. Statucki and his colleagues are in the process of working with the CTE departments in Clark County and with the standardized testing company Certiport to have SWCTA become an official testing center.

"We use Adobe Creative Suite Master Collection software in classes and in pre-professional work environments to give our students a competitive edge," adds Chang. "Providing additional opportunities for our students to earn Adobe professional certifications at our location will make them even more desirable and marketable because they can prove their ability to make an immediate impact in the workforce."

**Student success by the numbers**

By a number of measures, the district’s CTE curriculum is a resounding success. Students get hands-on, practical experience with Adobe Creative Suite Master Collection software in collaborative work environments. SWCTA students, for example, have participated in 13 internship opportunities, with strong feedback from the employers and the students about the program. Having a strong basic knowledge of graphics, animation, and design software enables students to investigate more advanced techniques to refine skills and develop new ones to expand on their creativity and improve work quality.

"Adobe software is prevalent in all stages of our work," says Flora Shi, a fourth-year web design student at SWCTA. "We’ve learned to use solutions such as Adobe Photoshop, Illustrator, Dreamweaver, and Flash Professional and combine them with other code languages to create diverse, professional-grade mobile apps that leave clients speechless. Adobe software gives us a distinct advantage over other students because we’re able to deliver creative, high-quality projects faster."
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Cindi Chang, Website design and development instructor, Southwest Career and Technical Academy

The technical academies provide a fast-track alternative to traditional high school programs for students who learn early on the path they want to pursue after high school. "I knew that this program would prepare me to succeed and help me achieve what I wanted in life," says Jonathan Cervantes, a senior at SWCTA. "It's a great feeling knowing that I can visualize and construct an idea and then apply the skills I've learned using Adobe Creative Suite software to translate my vision into a project that clients will love."

CTE curriculums are well-suited to students seeking immersive career training instead of a traditional high school program. "Students, teachers, parents, and administrators all see CTE programs as a structured introduction to a career field that provides learning outcomes not found in traditional schools," says Monte Bay, principal at West Career and Technical Academy. "Adobe software is a big part of the student experience because it allows students to capture their exceptional talents, academic performance indicators, and creative experiences in electronic form for colleges and prospective employers to see."

The highly focused CTE curriculums have a tremendous impact on student achievement, as evidenced by higher average attendance, student retention, and exceptional grade-point averages (GPA) across the academies. For example, SWCTA has consistently scored above the school district average on the district-wide math common assessments and 40% of the most recent senior class achieved a GPA of 3.9 or higher. More importantly, the school achieved an average daily attendance rate of nearly 99% in the last year, while increasing its student retention rate to 89%.

"A curriculum offering industry certifications is really attractive," says Felicia Nemcek principal, SWCTA. "Using industry-standard software such as Adobe Creative Suite Master Collection better engages students on a daily basis and adds validity to our programs by illustrating our commitment to fully preparing them to succeed in the workforce or as they continue their education. The result of our curriculum and being able to offer students the opportunity to take industry certifications is higher attendance and achievement."

In the future, the district will investigate ways to standardize its elementary and middle schools, as well as the remaining high schools on Adobe Creative Suite Master Collection. "The CTE programs have been successful largely because they provide the tools necessary to foster a desire to learn and grow. With the academies using Adobe software as the cornerstone of their programs, it only makes sense to bring the rest of the district on board to enhance the learning experience from the earliest stages through graduation," says Levy.

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