

Elkhart Area Career Center and TestOut:

TestOut[®] Case Study

Helping Students Certify, Earn College Credit,
and Prepare for Jobs

Need: IT Curriculum to Give Hands-on Experience

Elkhart Area Career Center (EACC) in Elkhart, Indiana, is a regional career technical high school with about one thousand students, 43 studying computer networking. Seventeen high schools in northern Indiana and southern Michigan feed into EACC, and students spend half of every school day at their high school and half at EACC. Beth Hall, computer networking teacher in the Business Technology department, has been teaching IT for 22 years at EACC. “Most of my students at EACC grew up with technology and like it. They like computers, and they’re curious what’s ‘under the hood,’” Hall said.

As Hall works with the students at EACC, she emphasizes practical experience and hands-on work that will prepare them to certify, get jobs in IT, and receive college credit for their work in high school. For example, Hall’s students gain practical experience with cables by cabling a new home built by EACC’s building trades program each year. “They run everything out to the POP. This area is completely satellite-ready, so it’s a very hands-on project,” Hall explained. Additionally, EACC has an agreement with Ivy Tech Community College and Vincennes University that grants students college credit when they receive an “A” or “B” letter grade in Hall’s class. Or, if students also receive certification, they can get even more college credit.

Hall wants students to take advantage of all of these valuable development opportunities, and that’s why she needs an IT curriculum that gives students the most hands-on practice. “The more they learn to do hands-on IT work, the better they are prepped for certification, college, and a career. Every little bit helps,” she said.

Solution: TestOut’s LabSim Lets Students Practice Until They “Get It”

TestOut’s LabSim is the curriculum solution that gives Hall’s students hands-on practice. Hall first used TestOut’s LabSim when she was adjunct faculty at a community college and said she always loved the product. When she began teaching networking five years ago at EACC, the department was already using LabSim, this time the browser version. “I fell in love with it,” Hall said. “Our students use both browser-based LabSim A+ courses. I also used LabSim A+ for myself and got A+ certified.”

Hall’s students use the components of TestOut’s LabSim mostly independently, reading the fact sheets, completing the hands-on labs, and taking the quizzes. She gives them benchmarks to gauge their own progress. “If they’re not at a benchmark, they work up to it,” Hall said. “When they take a quiz, I can see how they did and suggest if they may need to repeat it—sometimes a lot. Laptops and printers are the two challenges for the students, and LabSim lets them keep practicing until they get it.”

Because TestOut’s LabSim is online, students can make progress in the course at home or during breaks in their regular school day. “Not all seventeen high schools that students come from are on the same schedule,” Hall said. “But with LabSim, students can work on the course wherever they are. They treat it practically and plan to do it on breaks or weekends.”



Hall explained that even though EACC also uses Cisco's curriculum, "students need TestOut's LabSim to focus on and prepare for certification." Her second-year students often work on TestOut's LabSim together to help each other understand certain topics and to prepare for the A+ exam. "They take TestOut's LabSim practice exam every Friday, and when they're scoring in the 80s or 90s, I know they're ready to certify," Hall said. "TestOut's LabSim is great test prep. I like that students can put it in a mode that it immediately explains correct answers and gives the rationale. I love that. Students don't reinforce the wrong answer."

Results: Students Receive College Credit, Achieve Certification, and Find Jobs in IT

Using TestOut's LabSim to give students hands-on practice and to prepare for the certification exam, Hall had 10 high school students last year certify in A+, all ten with A+ Essentials and three of those also certifying in A+ Practical Application. Ninety percent of her students go on to college, and with the dual credit opportunity at EACC, students may leave high school with 22 college credits. Many of her students are finding IT jobs right out of high school that help them afford college and give them great experience. "The kids don't always realize the value of their experience, dual credit, and certification, but their parents do!" Hall said.

One of Hall's students, Braden Griman, described how TestOut's LabSim helped him succeed in passing A+ Essentials during his senior year. "LabSim prepped me for taking the exam so that I could feel confident," Griman said. He had used LabSim in school and also at home to prepare. "With A+ Essentials, I felt ready to take it when I scored 93 on the LabSim practice exam. Sure, I got some butterflies, but I told myself, 'Yeah, I know this.' I try my hardest to keep what I've learned in my mind and feel confident for the exam."

Now Griman is using TestOut's LabSim to train for A+ Practical Application and plans to complete his A+ certification by the end of 2011. "I'm watching the videos, studying the fact sheets, doing the labs, and taking the quizzes," he said. "LabSim is even better in Practical Application. We work with internal components of the computer hands on."