

SCHOOLS THAT SHINE

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HOW LANSING USD 469 IS WINNING BACK FAMILIES AND BUILDING SOMETHING BIGGER

A Kansas school district is redefining what public school can look like — welcoming families back through a virtual academy and driving graduation rates from 87% to 96% with targeted interventions.

QUICK FACTS

SCHOOL

Lansing USD 469

LOCATION

Lansing, Kansas

VIRTUAL PROGRAM:

Kansas Heartland Virtual Academy

POWERED BY:

Acellus® National Cyberschool

YEARS WITH ACELLUS:

3

GRADUATION RATE:

87% → 96%

FINANCIAL BENEFIT:

~\$4,000 net per virtual student

KEY CONTACTS:

Marty Kobza,
Superintendent

Dr. Christina Hoverson,
Director of Secondary
Alternative Programming

Miles Azzeh,
Director of Teaching and
Learning

THE CHALLENGE

When Marty Kobza arrived at Lansing USD 469 three years ago, the district was losing ground. Enrollment was declining. Community trust had eroded. Families were disengaging — some leaving for homeschool, others drifting to outside programs. And in Kansas, where funding follows the student, every family that walked out the door took resources with it.

Kobza knows this territory well. Across a 37-year career in public education — including 25 years as a superintendent and before that as a high school principal — what motivates him is going into districts and rebuilding them. He has done it in Wyoming, where he launched the Cowboy State Virtual Academy and watched enrollment grow rather than shrink. He has done it in Superior, Nebraska, and in Sheridan County School District #1 and Thermopolis, Wyoming. Two of those districts earned the distinction of Blue Ribbon schools. When he arrived in Lansing, he reached for a tool he had used before.

"One of the tools I've relied on to turn those districts around is Acellus," he says. "It's helped in a variety of ways: credit recovery, launching virtual schools, and reaching families we'd never been able to reach before. It's helped us rebuild community trust — especially with families who left the public schools with negative feelings, or who disengaged because of something they heard in the media — by giving them a real, authentic experience that shows these are good places. Combine all of that, and Acellus becomes something of a secret weapon in the rebuilding process."

THE DECISION

The district already had a virtual school when Kobza arrived — a contracted program serving about 26 students. It was small, it was limited, and it was not doing what a virtual school needed to do.



Marty Kobza
Superintendent



"The traditional brick-and-mortar K-12 system doesn't work for everyone," Kobza says. "But building a virtual school that simply delivers the same methodology over video or Zoom is the definition of insanity — it's doing the same thing for students without actually changing how we reach them. Acellus gave us a way to truly change the delivery."

The answer was Acellus National Cyberschool — a hybrid program that allows families to learn at home through the Acellus platform while remaining fully enrolled in their local district. For Lansing, it became the foundation of Kansas Heartland Virtual Academy, led by Dr. Christina Hoverson, Director of Secondary Alternative Programming.

"Many families have lost trust in public schools, or want a different model for religious or political reasons — you name it," Kobza explains. "Acellus acts as a liaison between those families and the district, giving us the chance to show them what we're doing and rebuild that trust. We've actually seen some of these students return to brick-and-mortar, realizing, 'This isn't what I thought. The public schools are helpful, they're engaging, and they're using this product.'"

The rigor question comes up early with any district considering a virtual program. Kobza addresses it directly with his own teachers. "I ask teachers two questions," he says. "Before a student moves on in your class, do they have to score 80% on every single assignment? No. Do they have to master every concept before they move on? No. But that's exactly what Acellus requires of students working through the virtual program. The rigor is absolutely there — it's just a different method, a different way of thinking, a new lens."



A Lansing elementary teacher leads an interactive learning session with her students.

THE PROGRAM

Kansas Heartland Virtual Academy runs on the Acellus National Cyberschool model. Students learn at home through the Acellus platform, supported by district-employed academic learning coaches and Acellus teachers who check in daily. Families get the flexibility they are looking for. The district keeps the student — and the funding that comes with them.

Miles Azzeh, Director of Teaching and Learning, describes the experience of getting started as smoother than expected. "I'm a big baseball fan, so I'll put it this way — Acellus bats a thousand," he says. "Parents don't seem to have any issues with it, teachers are happy with it, and it works very well."

What Hoverson has built at the secondary level goes well beyond credit recovery — adding AP classes, ASL, and credit advancement options that a traditional schedule could not accommodate. The Writing Tutor has been a particular standout. "Students come in maybe at a 25%," she says, "and they leave at 95% to 100%."

For students who are behind, Vectored Instruction is the engine that drives recovery. "That is where Vectored Instruction® comes in," Kobza says. "It assesses where a student is on the fly, then goes back to reteach and fill the gaps, all while the student keeps moving forward with grade-level content. Vectored Instruction is something that is extremely unique

BY THE NUMBERS

Retention Rate:
VIRTUALLY 100%

Writing Tutor Gains:
**25% → 95-100%
ON FINAL DRAFTS**

Vectored Instruction Gains:
**18% AVERAGE INCREASE
IN LESSON SCORES**

to Acellus versus other programs I have used. We've seen an 18% gain among students being Vectored on their retakes, and they're mastering content at high levels within the program. That's been a real game changer."

THE RESULTS

The numbers coming out of Lansing USD 469 are hard to argue with.

"Our retention in the virtual school is close to 100%," Kobza says. "Unless a family physically moves out of state, we keep those students — either in the Kansas Heartland virtual program or by bringing them into our district, which several families have done. Parents aren't just satisfied — they're extremely satisfied."

The financial picture has shifted too. The district receives approximately \$5,600 per virtual student in Kansas, with a net benefit of around \$4,000 per student after program expenses. For a district that arrived with declining enrollment and tightening resources, that is a meaningful change.

"When I arrived, Lansing High School's graduation rate was about 87%," Kobza says. "Raising it took a combination of things — people working extremely hard at the high school and a new school-within-a-school model. We also transitioned away from some previous products to Acellus, using it for credit recovery and to support students in their areas of weakness. That's been the backbone. Combined with the hard work of our staff, it's moved our graduation

rate from 87% when we arrived to roughly 96% this year. Acellus has been a powerful part of that — a real driver of both our graduation rate and student achievement."

Students who complete Acellus courses and return to the traditional building arrive confident and on track. "We have not seen a single problem with a kid coming from Acellus to the high school or vice versa," Hoverson says.

WHAT'S NEXT

"The impact of using Acellus in our Kansas Heartland Virtual Academy has come on several levels," Kobza says. "First, it's helped us think differently — to recognize there are other ways to approach education. Education is shifting from the old, straightforward, industrial-era model to something more like a menu, where families have choice. And there's a full continuum: it can look much like school always has, which still works for many students; it can be fully virtual; or it can be something in between. Acellus is helping our district think through what we can be, what we can become, and what we can offer our community."

"It's a tremendous tool, and our community is seeing us approach it with humility," he continues. "We don't have all the answers all the time, there are other ways of doing this, and we're going to bring those options to you. Superintendents across the country have to embrace that. School choice can feel like a bad word — the idea that funding follows a student from one district to another — but it can also be a choice you offer internally. You can provide that choice within your own district, without worrying about students leaving for someone else. That's how you create a win-win."

"The win is for the student and their family — a chance to engage with the district as a homeschool student, to keep learning after a suspension or expulsion, or to recover credits and get back on track for graduation, opening doors for the rest of their life. Those are all engagement opportunities we need to seize. There's a financial win for the district, too. And ultimately, the student is going to get their education somewhere — it can be with you, because you were humble enough to open yourself up to other options, or it can be with someone else."

"At Kansas Heartland Virtual Academy, we're happy to engage with those students and take them. So that really becomes the impetus for the local district to decide: we want to keep our families, we want them here, we want to engage with them — or they can get a wonderful opportunity and a wonderful education at the Kansas Heartland Virtual Academy."

