

Clark County School District

Las Vegas, Nevada

Online world language program helps nation's fifth-largest school district expand student opportunities in the face of growing teacher shortages

To ensure ample opportunities are available for middle and high school students to take world language courses in schools where a teacher does not exist for that language, or where specific world language courses are not offered, Clark County School District (CCSD) provides a robust supplemental online world language program using Stride Learning Solutions' Middlebury Interactive Languages™¹ curriculum.

Clark County School District (CCSD), based in Las Vegas, Nevada, is the fifth largest school district in the country, and is home to more than 320,000 students in kindergarten through 12th grade—enrolling approximately 75 percent of all K–12 students in the entire state of Nevada. The district includes 360 schools covering 8,000 square miles. It is a minority majority student district that includes a large component of native Spanish-speaking students. CCSD is also the largest employer in Nevada with more than 42,000 employees.²

The Middlebury Interactive world language courses taught at CCSD include Spanish, French, Chinese, and German, and are provided to students throughout the district by the Nevada Learning Academy (NVLA), a CCSD alternative school. NVLA is both a virtual school and a campus-based, blended learning school serving middle and high school students in the Clark County School District, as well as students across Nevada. It enrolls nearly 300 full-time students and more than 9,000 part-time students. Most NVLA high school students are full- or part-time online students, whereas the middle school is predominately a blended learning program in which students are physically on NVLA's campus twice each week.

“After the first full year’s usage, we have many examples of success, and our Middlebury Interactive Languages™ teachers believe that it is better preparing students to be more fluent speakers.”

– Andrea Connolly,
NVLA Principal

Starting in the fall of 2017, NVLA switched to the Middlebury Interactive Languages curriculum. “Two years-ago we had a different world language offering,” says NVLA Principal Andrea Connolly. “We have used almost every available offering. Our teachers believe that Middlebury Interactive is the best world language solution for CCSD’s needs. Moving to Middlebury has been a smooth transition for both teachers and students.”

“We don’t have long-term data yet,” Connolly states. “But after the first full year’s usage, we have many examples of success, and our teachers of Middlebury Interactive Languages™ believe that it is better preparing students to be more fluent speakers.”

DISTRICT (SY 2018–2019)

Type of school:
School district

Schools (360):

226 Elementary schools
59 Middle schools
49 High schools
19 Alternative schools
7 Special schools

Program opened (started):
Fall 2017

District Enrollment:
320,000

Ethnicity:

46.4% Hispanic
24.5% White
14.1% Black
6.6% Multiracial
6.4% Asian
1.6% Hawaiian / Pacific Islander
0.4% Native American

Free/Reduced-price lunch:
63.84%

Program (school) staff:

4 Full time teachers (3 Spanish,
1 French)
1 Part-time teacher (Chinese)

Students served:
1,000 grades 6–12

Instructional model:
Supplemental online courses

PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

Growing language teacher shortages and resource challenges limit students' world language course options at Las Vegas-based Clark County School District (CCSD)—the nation's fifth-largest school district.

To supplement classroom language course offerings, the Nevada Learning Academy (NVLA), CCSD's online and campus-based alternative school, created and delivers the online world language program to middle and high school students across the district.

The program is based on Stride Learning Solutions' Middlebury Interactive Languages™ curriculum and includes courses in Spanish, French, Chinese, and German for grades 6 through 12.

All courses are taught by full-time NVLA world language teachers, plus part-time language teachers from CCSD's regular brick-and-mortar schools.

Teachers create an immersive learning environment around courses consisting of several components: weekly live broadcasts, regular face-to-face school visits, impromptu teacher-produced videos, and constant one-to-one communications with students and parents via email, text, as well as direct phone conversations.

Students devote five to seven hours per week to online courses in school labs, using school-provided portable computing devices, or their own computing devices via CCSD's bring your own device program (BYOD).

World language skills crucial in today's society

Multiple language skills are becoming more critical as both society and business increasingly spans the globe. The new federal Every Student Succeeds Act stresses that foreign language ability is essential for students to fully participate in today's global society and increasingly diverse communities.³

Research by the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) shows that language learning can support academic achievement, provide cognitive benefits, and positively affect attitudes and beliefs about language and other cultures.⁴

A variety of sources report that employers are seeking more employees with fluent foreign language skills.⁵ In Massachusetts, for example, a study found that online job ads seeking candidates who could speak a language other than English skyrocketed.⁶

Classroom courses not meeting needs

With many thousands of students spread out across more than a hundred middle and high schools, it is not practical for every individual school to consistently serve students' needs for world language courses in the classroom—both in terms of capacity as well as languages offered. The program augments classroom instruction with online world language courses creating a balanced and robust offering to all students. Many of the reasons why classroom-based world language instruction does not meet CCSD's needs fall into two basic categories: language teacher shortages, and traditional logistical and economic challenges typical in a large and diverse school district.

World language teacher shortages. A substantial teacher shortage exists for all of the languages. Connolly says, "For instance, even with such a high percentage of native Spanish speaking people in our district, we still can't fulfill CCSD's needs for Spanish teachers." She went on to say, "Teacher needs can also arise suddenly; for example, a school called us mid-year and said their Spanish teacher suddenly resigned, so they immediately moved all of their Spanish language students into our online program to finish out the year. Likewise, two other schools enrolled all of their Spanish students, about 90 each, because they couldn't find a Spanish language teacher."⁷

Logistical and economic challenges for schools and students. In such a large school district, there are many logistical and economic reasons why the supplemental online program is a

great solution to maximize student opportunities while conserving human and fiscal resources. The school may not be able to offer a specific, or even any, world language courses. There may be more students wanting a language course than the school can accommodate. Online courses provide greater flexibility for students who have schedule conflicts. Athletes, performers and actors, for example, often can't attend regular classes, as well as students with medical issues who frequently work at home.

Teachers are key in multi-faceted courses

NVLA's language teachers, together with additional part-time language teachers from CCSD brick-and-mortar schools, are the online language teachers for students across this huge school district. They organize and lead a program consisting of several integrated components, creating a well-rounded and immersive world language learning environment.

The NVLA world language teaching staff in the fall of 2018 includes:

- 4 full-time language teachers: 3 Spanish, 1 French
- 1 full-time world language/social studies teacher: German
- 1 part-time world language teacher who works full-time at a CCSD brick-and-mortar school building: Chinese

"In addition to NVLA and CCSD's own teachers," Connolly says, "it's also great to have certified Stride Learning Solutions teachers available as needed for those situations where we need a temporary teacher."

Students participate in Middlebury Interactive language courses in different ways. Most middle school students access Middlebury Interactive courses during one period of the day by going to a lab in their home school. A teacher or teacher's aid is on staff in each lab to assist students, though they are not language teachers.

High school students work on Middlebury Interactive courses in labs, media centers, or on school-provided devices, but many work on their own personal devices that they bring to school each day. "Most schools incorporate a bring your own device (BYOD) strategy," says Slighting. "CCSD has been very successful at establishing a bring your own device (BYOD) program. We believe CCSD is one of the more technology friendly districts in the nation."

Students who take supplemental Middlebury Interactive language courses from regular CCSD schools constitute the largest percentage of courses delivered in the NVLA online language program. In addition, NVLA provides these courses to most of its own full-time online and blended learning students, other specialty and charter schools, and to Nevada students outside of the district, as requested.

SPANISH TEACHER SHORTAGE DRIVES CHANGE IN STRATEGY

Anna Slighting, a middle school Spanish teacher, partners with schools for Spanish courses. "A lot of CCSD students seek to take Spanish each year," says Slighting. "Because of the teacher shortage here in Las Vegas, many principals, especially in middle schools, are deciding in advance not even to offer some or all Spanish courses at their schools. Instead, students are enrolled into our Middlebury [Interactive] Spanish program, and students work in the school lab one period each day, along with students who are taking other types of courses."

"I like Middlebury [Interactive's] differentiated activities and reading comprehension. There are plenty of great listening activities and kinesthetic hands-on activities where students are physically moving things on the screen."

– Anna Slighting

SPANISH IS THE LANGUAGE MOST IN DEMAND

“Of the four languages we offer through Middlebury Interactive, our biggest use in Clark County School District is Spanish,” says Connolly. “We have many students who want to take Spanish, and it’s quite hard to find Spanish teachers in Nevada, despite the fact that there exists a very large percentage of Spanish speakers in the district.”

“As a result, our online Spanish teachers here at NVLA carry a heavy online student load, with approximately 300 students each. Middlebury Interactive’s ease of use by both teachers and students helped make this student load possible considering everything teachers must do to take care of 300 students,” remarks Connolly. “That ease of use was a key part of our decision to select Middlebury Interactive.”

Courses and content

CCSD uses the complete Middlebury Interactive world languages curriculum for grades 6 through 12, which include Spanish, Chinese, French, and German. (See Table 1 below).

Language	Middle School (grades 6–8)	High School (grades 9–12)
Spanish	Spanish 1 Spanish 2	Competency I, II, III Fluency I, II Advanced Placement*
French	French 1 French 2	Competency I, II, III Fluency I, II Advanced Placement*
German	German 1 German 2	Competency I, II
Chinese	Chinese 1 Chinese 2	Competency Fluency I, II

CCSD’s world language curriculum standards are the same for both the classroom and online language instructional programs. As such, both classroom and online courses use the same syllabus, and both are NCAA accredited. “This consistency is important,” says Carmen Andrews, NVLA Spanish teacher, “as some students may take French I in the classroom one year and French II online the following year.”

The Middlebury Interactive world language courses focus on immersive and practical

reading, writing, listening, and speaking activities, and align with the national standards developed by the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL).

While CCSD used other online world language offerings for several years, it is now in the second full year of using the Middlebury Interactive Languages curriculum. And even at this early stage, principals and teachers are seeing signs of success. Teachers and students find the curriculum rigorous and challenging, which often paces students through activities very rapidly. Connolly says, “Middlebury [Interactive] content is quite comprehensive. For example, we really like how it aids students in listening and speaking.” Carmen Andrews says, “The AP® Spanish course is challenging and comprehensive, which is a great fit for our many native Spanish-speaking students.”

“Easy and timely communication is part of our school’s culture. We want students to feel like they can communicate with us at any point, and if we’re available, we’re going to answer. Our goal is to make sure we respond within 24 hours.”

– Anna Slighting

Immersive learning with multiple instructional components

Instructional components consist of a rich mixture of online content, coupled with live broadcasts, face-to-face school visits, timely teacher-produced videos, informational postings, and direct one-to-one communications between teachers and students and parents via email, text, as well as phone conversations.

Middlebury Interactive activities

Students devote five to seven hours per week working online with Middlebury Interactive learning activities. Teachers recommend regular daily use, plus some extra work on weekends; however, some students have schedule or other conflicts and opt to do much or all of their work on weekends.

Live broadcast sessions

Students attend weekly online live broadcast sessions hosted by their language teachers. All students are not normally able to attend every live session, so sessions are recorded and posted, allowing students to view them when they are able. Live sessions typically focus on what students need to produce that week, as well as questions from the previous week.

School visits by teachers

Teachers travel to schools to meet with their students at least once a quarter. Much of the visit is motivational and provides a chance for teachers to get to know and bond with students. Visits also help teachers more directly understand individual students' needs. Teachers say these face-to-face visits are particularly useful for middle school students who generally need more support than high school students who are more used to taking online courses.

Real-time teacher-produced videos

On a regular basis, teachers produce and post new videos for students. The videos cover topics of the moment. They may include additional explanations on language topics, areas where students are struggling, or early in the semester, technicalities and standards of how to take and navigate the course.

Weekly postings

Each language teacher regularly posts announcements that can contain a variety of subjects, from further explanations on language topics, to upcoming activities and events. For example, Andrews says, "I often post links to extra practice activities, or I will announce a time for an impromptu evening live session to help some students who said they want extra help on specific topics."

One-to-one communication

Surrounding all the instructional components of the course is a constant stream of one-to-one and small group communication between teachers, students, and parents. Emails and texts are the go-to method, but direct phone conversations are also used. Students have teachers' work phone numbers. It's all about the relationship between teachers and students. Students know that, even though they're taking an online course, they are never more than an email, text, or phone call away from their teachers—within published teacher availability times.

AP® SPANISH SERVICES VITAL ROLE

Andrea Connolly states, "Las Vegas has a high percentage of native Spanish speaking students and many of them take Middlebury Interactive AP® Spanish specifically because it's their native language. This is great, as this not only helps strengthen their Spanish skills, but it also is beneficial, in that it helps them get used to taking an AP® course in general."

"In fact, one of the reasons we choose Middlebury Interactive Languages was because of its strong AP® Spanish course."

"The first month of school is always full of very heavy back and forth communications, with most questions about the technicalities of the online experience. I want students to understand course usage standards early in the year, so online learning will be smooth going forward."

– Carmen Andrews

Solid examples point to early success

After CCSD's first year using Middlebury Interactive Languages, student feedback has been strong, and teachers are seeing many examples of success.

Our instructional team believes that our Middlebury Interactive-based world language program is better preparing students, especially for one of the most important aspects of learning a new language—being more fluent speakers and listeners—not just reading and writing.

– Andrea Connolly, NVLA principal

A student told me that the Middlebury [Interactive] French course was really hard, compared to the past online language course, but it definitely helped her understand the language better.

– Andrea Connolly, NVLA principal

I had a student in my online Spanish 1 course who went on to classroom-based Spanish 2 in a brick-and-mortar school. Her Spanish 2 classroom teacher told me it was the first time he had a student who took Spanish 1 online who could seamlessly go on to Spanish 2 in the classroom.

– Carmen Andrews, NVLA teacher

I was extremely happy to see that many of my Middlebury [Interactive] AP[®] Spanish students were getting AP[®] scores of 4 and 5 and getting college credit.

– Carmen Andrews, NVLA teacher

After having taken Middlebury Interactive Spanish with me, I am confident that my students are very well prepared for the next level of Spanish they will encounter at their brick-and-mortar high schools.

– Anna Slighting, NVLA teacher

I spoke with the father of one of my middle school students who took my Middlebury online French 1 and 2 courses in the 7th and 8th grade. He also happens to be the assistant principal at his daughter's middle school. I had previously mentioned to him that these courses were particularly strong and accelerated-pace courses. His daughter is self-driven, super diligent and always wants to succeed. Her parents even rewarded her success with these courses with a trip to France. But, when she later entered high school and enrolled in an upper level classroom-based French III class, she was nervous and thought she might know less than the upper-class students. To her delight, however, she found that she already knew more than the rest of the class, hands-down.

– Anna Slighting, NVLA teacher

¹Middlebury Interactive Languages was formed in 2010 as a joint venture between K12 Inc. (now Stride, Inc.) and Middlebury College, a recognized international leader in language pedagogy. The college participated in the design and review of all Middlebury branded courses and in the governance of the company through 2016 when it sold its ownership interest to K12 Inc. Today, Stride, Inc. and its affiliates continue to provide the Middlebury courses under the strict guidelines provided by the College in a license agreement.

²Clark County Schools comparative nationwide size rank and other statistics in this paragraph are for the school year 2018–19.

³U.S. Department of Education, Non-Regulatory Guidance, Student Support and Academic Enrichment Grants. October 2016. Page 21 and references on other pages.

⁴American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL). What the research shows. <https://www.actfl.org/advocacy/what-the-research-shows>

⁵New American Economy, Not Lost in Translation, March 2017. http://www.newamericaneconomy.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/NAE_Bilingual_V8.pdf

⁶New American Economy, Language Diversity & The Workforce: The Growing Need for Bilingual Workers in Massachusetts' Economy. <http://www.newamericaneconomy.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/MA-Biliteracy-Brief.pdf>

⁷This quote refers the 2017–18 school year, and the several years leading up to it relative to teacher shortages.

Testimonials are representative of clients of Fuel Education. Fuel Education was rebranded as Stride Learning Solutions in 2020–2021, and as such continues to offer digital curriculum, resources, and support for online and blended learning implementations, including world language programs utilizing Middlebury Interactive Languages curriculum.

All data noted in this case study was provided to Evergreen Education Group by the school district.