



Breakthrough Saint Paul

Mounds Park Academy & Saint Paul Public Schools

“Breakthrough Anywhere” Pilot Overview

Introduction

For the past three years, Breakthrough Saint Paul (BSP) has provided highly motivated, under-resourced middle school students from Saint Paul Public Schools with an intensive two-year, rear-round, tuition-free academic enrichment program. Starting in 2008, BSP began moving to a full six-year program model by piloting a new initiative that will eventually serve these same students for four more years in high school. We are calling this high school initiative “Breakthrough Anywhere.”

“Breakthrough Anywhere” is taking our high school program in a new direction – online. The vision is to provide all BSP high school students personal laptops and high speed internet so that they can access program services and online resources anywhere at anytime. Students eventually will use this technology for many important purposes:

- Learning basic computer literacy skills such as typing, office suite, and internet safety;
- Learning methods for doing high quality, intense research online and writing essays;
- Completing in school projects and assignments;
- Researching, planning, and applying for college;
- Accessing volunteer tutors online through Skype voice-to-voice and virtual whiteboards;
- Learning and practicing basic skills in financial literacy;
- Communicating efficiently and consistently with program staff, teachers, and students;
- Learning fun and useful skills in blogging, web design, graphic design, and others.

Rationale

There are many reasons BSP is moving to online enrichment in high school. Most importantly, it makes curricular sense. Our students will enter a technological workplace where basic skills in email, word processing, and online research are assumed. Moreover, we have found that often the only way students can apply for scholarships, college, and jobs is online. Unless we take action, our motivated, under-resourced students, many of whom do not have consistent access to basic technology, will be at a disadvantage in school and in life.

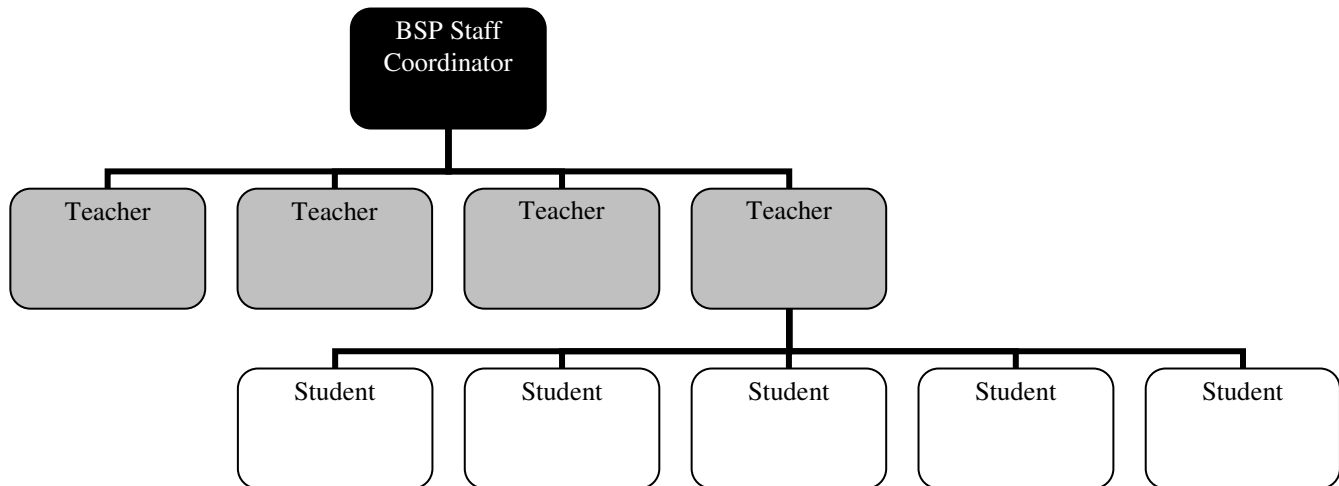
This model also makes economic sense for Breakthrough. With bus transportation and energy prices rising substantially, and with twice as many BSP students soon to be in grades 9-12 than in 7-8, the conventional model of hosting program sessions at MPA is becoming cost prohibitive. Fortunately, while energy costs are rising, laptop computer prices are falling, making them and many free, high-quality, internet-based resources more accessible.

Finally, this project makes developmental sense. In high school, the needs and interests of our students are diversifying. As a result, it is harder for BSP to create on-site programming that meets all of these needs at the high level of quality we expect. Through computers and the internet, we are able to personalize each student’s enrichment work. And given that students can use the laptops from anywhere at anytime, it also allows students the flexibility to fit BSP into their own schedules, which are becoming harder to align due to increased involvement in extra-curricular activities and jobs.

*** In the pages that follow, we explain our vision for piloting “Breakthrough Anywhere” in 2009.**

Pilot Staffing Structure

For the pilot phase of Breakthrough Anywhere, we will work with 20 committed 10th graders and their families. Four teachers will each work with five of these students throughout the whole pilot project. One Breakthrough staff member will coordinate the program. See the organizational structure below.



Student Responsibilities

Each student will be responsible for accomplishing various concrete tasks throughout the year. Some of these tasks are routine, and others are tasks that just need to be done until they are accomplished. Below is a list of those tasks:

1. Regular Routine Tasks
 - a. Check email at least once every day.
 - b. Check your SPPS campus portal once a week.
 - c. Email your teacher at least once a week with your weekly assignment.
 - d. Skype your teacher at least once a week to discuss your weekly assignment.
 - e. Keep your computer organized, updated, protected, and running smoothly.
 - f. If you have tech problems, follow the established trouble shooting process.

2. “Do Until Complete” Tasks
 - a. Continue typing lessons three times a week each until you have met your goal.
 - b. Identify at least one scholarship or contest and apply.
 - c. Complete an Admission Possible application, if eligible.
 - d. Apply to and enroll in at least one summer enrichment opportunity.

Teacher Responsibilities

Teachers will be responsible for making sure that each of their five students successfully completes the program requirements. This involves making sure that students are completing their basic daily routines like checking email, reading and revising students’ weekly assignments, connecting with students once a week via Skype to offer support and feedback, and helping students keep their computer running smoothly. We anticipate that former BSP teachers or other area college students will be interested in taking on this role.

Coordinator Responsibilities

This position will be responsible for training, supporting, and managing the teachers to make sure that each student is succeeding in the program. This person will also be the ultimate point person for technology issues, outsourcing major issues to our tech service provider.

Pilot Curricular Structure

The pilot project for Breakthrough Anywhere is divided into five curricular units, all of varying subject and duration. Each unit is further divided into a number of weeks, and each week has one assignment that builds on the previous assignment and pushes the student another step toward meeting the unit objective. Each weekly assignment is designed to be a valuable learning experience that is also manageable given students' normal school workloads. Weekly assignments are always due on a Sunday evening, and a follow-up Skype call is required mid-week.

Unit 1: Online Research

By the end of this unit, students will be able to use two scholarly online research databases to find high-quality resources that can be used to support a five paragraph essay on a particular current events issue. Students will also be able to cite resources correctly, evaluate websites to identify those that should not be used for formal research, and create a strong essay outline. This unit is important because students will need to use the internet to do research for school projects, and knowing how to use it responsibly and effectively is critical.

Unit Week	Assignment Due Date	Weekly Assignment Description
Week 1	Sunday, January 25	Research Topic Exploration and Selection. Write a paragraph about why you selected the topic you did.
Week 2	Sunday, February 1	Search two online databases (e.g. Lexus Nexus) and identify 10-15 articles to read and create a bibliography.
Week 3	Sunday, February 8	Read five of those articles, and write a paragraph summary of each one.
Week 4	Sunday, February 15	Outline a five paragraph essay on your topic

Unit 2: Summer Options

By the end of this unit, students will be able to use the internet to research summer options that meet their interests and personal constraints. Students also will be able to evaluate their program options, make decisions about which ones to pursue, and break down and complete the application process for at least one opportunity. This unit is important because students will need to use the internet to find out about and apply to scholarship, job, and educational opportunities long into the future.

Unit Week	Assignment Due Date	Weekly Assignment Description
Week 1	Sunday, February 22	Identify your summer interests and also personal constraints (e.g. cost, dates, time, location, transportation, etc...)
Week 2	Sunday, March 1	Use the internet to identify at least 20 summer options that are realistic given your constraints.
Week 3	Sunday, March 8	Research your top 10 choices. Then write three paragraphs explaining which options are your top three choices and why.
Week 4	Sunday, March 15	Make a google calendar that includes all of your options and their dates. You will use this in conversation with your teacher this week as you decide.
Week 5	Sunday, March 22	Make a to-do list for registrations and applications to these options.
Week 6	Sunday, March 29	Start working on your to-do list items

Unit 3: College Planning Basics

By the end of this unit, students will have an activated Naviance account that they can use in future BSP programming to search for and apply to college. They also will be able to articulate their college-prep curriculum plan for the rest of their high school career. Finally, they will be able to write and maintain an updated resume. This unit is important because it accomplishes some basic tasks that students will need to complete to stay on the college path in high school. Provided Breakthrough Anywhere continues, these students will use these tools at a much more in depth level in the future.

Unit Week	Assignment Due Date	Weekly Assignment Description
Week 1	Sunday, April 12	Set up your Naviance account at school. Scan and email the permission slip to BSP.
Week 2	Sunday, April 19	Visit your counselor and input your high school curriculum plan.
Week 3	Sunday, April 26	Create a resume for yourself using one of several templates.

Unit 4: Financial Literacy

By the end of this unit, students will have created a monthly budget and tracked their expenses against that budget. To help them, students will learn how to use Excel and several important calculating formulas. Students will also familiarize themselves with the FAFSA form and learn more about the financial information requested. This unit is important because high school students are beginning to take more responsibility for their finances, an important part of preparing to go to college.

Unit Week	Assignment Due Date	Weekly Assignment Description
Week 1	Sunday, May 3	Demonstrate use of formulas in Excel. Create your personal budget.
Week 2	Sunday, May 10	Create your own personal budget
Week 3	Sunday, May 17	Track your actual expenses against your budget
Week 4	Sunday, May 24	Revise your budget based on two weeks of actual expenses.
Week 5	Sunday, May 31	Understanding the FAFSA form.

Unit 5: Wrap Up

By the end of this unit, students will be able to give BSP their final evaluation of Breakthrough Anywhere and return their computers to the program.

Unit Week	Assignment Due Date	Weekly Assignment Description
Week 1	Sunday, June 7	Final program evaluation and computer return

Pilot Student Support Strategies

For the most part, students will work independently and on a schedule that meets their needs as long as they are submitting the weekly assignments by the deadline and completing their basic routines consistently. However, to help them stay on track with this independence, we are using several strategies and tools listed below:

Basic Training

Before receiving their computers, students will attend a two day training that will cover all of the basic computer skills they need to successfully complete this pilot program. Each student will demonstrate proficiency in these areas before they take their computer home and begin the program. These skills include but are not limited to:

- Safe handling of the laptops
- How to navigate the operating system
- Organizing files on the hard drive
- Safely accessing and using the internet
- Protecting your computer from viruses, damage, and theft
- Using email, Google Docs, and Google Calendar
- Using all required software

Saturday Sessions

Throughout the pilot project, students will attend approximately one 3.5-hour Saturday session a month. At these sessions, we will provide students with an introduction to each unit, more training on the software needed during the unit, and details about the weekly assignments. We also will do lessons and activities that complement our learning objectives for the unit, which can only be done in person. These Saturdays also will allow our participants and teachers to reconnect in person, which we believe is important for success in their remote communications.

Unit #	Saturday Session Date	Supporting Topic / Activity
Unit 1	Saturday, January 24	Lay out entire unit. Train on necessary features. Successfully submit the first assignment together.
Unit 2	Saturday, February 21	Lay out the entire unit. Train on necessary features. Have interest and constraint conversation in person.
	Saturday, March 7	Summer Options Fair at the Blake School
Unit 3	Saturday, April 4	Lay out the entire unit. Train on necessary features. Orient students to Naviance system so they see its importance and capabilities.
Unit 4	Saturday, May 2	Teachers lay out their entire unit. They train on necessary features.
Unit 5	N/A	Students return their computers.

Routine

Another strategy that we are implementing in Breakthrough Anywhere is the power of routine. Given that we will not see students face to face very often, and given that we are expecting them to work independently, we cannot afford to have unclear expectations. Clear routines allow students to know what is expected and to have many opportunities to meet them.

There are several key tools that work to reinforce the routine and set students up for success.

1. A Google Calendar with all assignments and Saturday sessions will automatically email reminders to students.
2. Because students will be checking their email once a day, they will receive these reminders and also any other communications from their teacher or the staff coordinator.
3. The teacher makes a Skype call to each student once a week sometime on Wednesdays. This will be another reminder and also allow for clarification of weekly assignments.