South Carolina Schools Chart a Course Toward Digital Equity

DILLON SCHOOL DISTRICT FOUR
DILLON, SOUTH CAROLINA
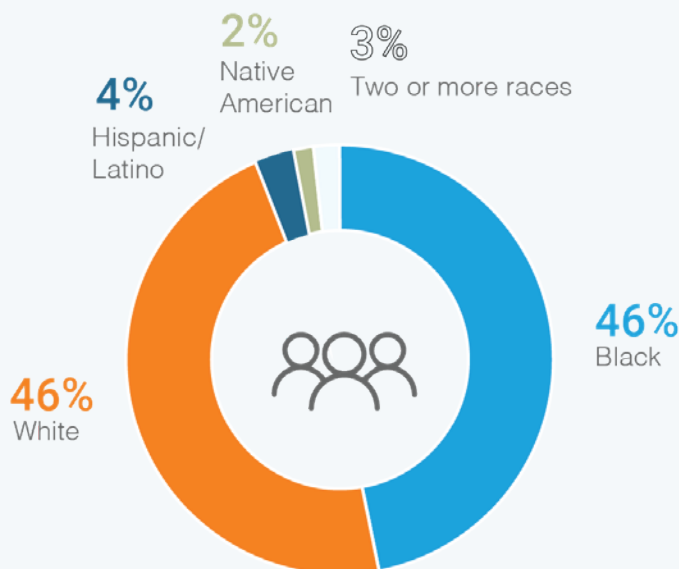
PK-12 | **3850** students | **5** elem schools | **3** MS/HS | **3** CEP schools

RURAL ROADS

For small, rural districts like South Carolina's Dillon School District Four, it's been a long road to achieve digital equity. All 3,850 Dillon students in pre-K through 12th grade qualify for free school meals through the federal Community Eligibility Provision. In the sparsely populated community about 150 miles north of Charleston, many families don't have home internet access.

- **2%** Native American
- **3%** Two or more races
- **4%** Hispanic/Latino
- **46%** Black
- **46%** White

The district's first step on the path to digital equity was getting computers in students' hands –an effort hastened by the move to remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. Now, the district provides one-to-one devices. Amid ongoing efforts to expand wireless connectivity into the state's remote areas, leaders have turned their attention to ensuring all students are equipped with the digital skills necessary for future success.

> " **Over the past six years, our small, rural district has benefited greatly from the state's funding of Learning.com. We can clearly see that our students are making significant gains.**
>
> — *Paula Yohe, Director of Technology and Information Systems*

BUILDING DIGITAL SKILLS

In an effort to ensure digital equity for South Carolina students in rural or lower socio-economic areas, the state legislature began funding the Palmetto Digital Literacy Program in 2017. Through the Department of Education, the program enables eligible districts to adopt Learning.com's EasyTech K-12 digital literacy curriculum to build digital skills including keyboarding, online safety, digital citizenship, business applications and coding.

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Dillon School District Four was among the first cohort of schools to participate in the Palmetto Digital Literacy Program, and avidly uses EasyTech at every one of its school sites to this day. Lab assistants at each campus work with students on digital skills from keyboarding to coding, while classroom teachers also use the program to cover online safety lessons such as those required by the Children's Internet Protection Act (CIPA).

"Learning.com allows teachers with any background knowledge to become confident teaching these skills," says Paula Yohe, the Director of Technology and Information Systems.

At Lake View High School, a 6th-12th grade campus, business education teacher Angela King uses Learning.com with her 6th, 7th and 8th graders. She works with students in 9-week elective courses, and her primary goal is to get all of her students keyboarding fluently and confidently – a lifelong skill that's especially important with online standardized testing.

Once they've mastered keyboarding, King's students move onto business applications like spreadsheets and word processing, which will be essential in high school and beyond. Finally, she introduces her 8th graders to EasyTech's coding lessons, where students complete their own coding projects. Throughout her classes, students build foundations for future success in school, careers, college and life.

"The digital literacy modules are my favorite. I like how it's interactive and keeps the kids interested," says King. "Our students have more access than ever, and younger and younger ones are getting phones. We talk about our digital footprint all the time, making sure they know that it lasts forever."

EXPANDING SUCCESS

This focus on equipping students with digital skills is yielding tangible results. In 2022, Dillon's Lake View High School outperformed larger, more affluent schools in the state to win first place in Learning.com's keyboarding proficiency contest.

"Our district has benefited not only from the expertly designed lessons and activities for students, but also from ongoing professional development and technical support," says Yohe.

Thanks to the state's continued funding of the Palmetto Digital Literacy Program, students in more South Carolina schools can enjoy the benefits of Learning.com's EasyTech, gaining the skills to excel in a digital world.

As Yohe says, "Learning.com is a valuable tool in creating a highly skilled technical workforce for the future of South Carolina."

> **"**
> ## The students like the gamification of it – collecting those stars and prizes. They're learning but they think they're playing.
>
> *— Perry L. Ford, District Instructional Technology Coach*

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