



# Martin County School District

CASE STUDY

The Martin County School District is consistently ranked among the state's top-performing school districts. The community takes pride in the quality of its instructional and support staff. As Martin County's second largest employer, more than 3,200 district professionals work together as a team to provide students with a world-class education.

Martin County has created a learning environment where the focus is not only on educating students but also on making a wide range of professional growth opportunities accessible to every employee who supports them.

## The Challenge

*"We didn't have a blended learning system for professional development system or an online platform or anything where teachers could go, and we needed one."*

— Heather Padgett, Coordinator of Professional Development

Four years ago, the Martin County School District was ready to roll out a new curriculum. Along with it came a need to train the K-5 teachers who would be using it. The challenge was to provide professional development to every single teacher and make it so that each one got the same experience. The Professional Development team needed to find a way to streamline its process so the content was always the same regardless of which literacy coach delivered it.

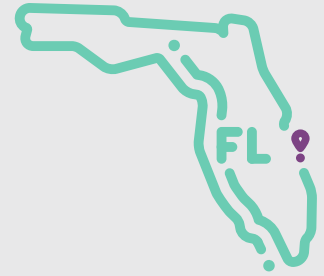
Beyond that first project, a burgeoning need for training amplified the demand for district-wide professional development. Student services urgently needed youth mental health programming and more Social Emotional Learning training. The transportation director wanted training for bus drivers. Other departments were clamoring for support. The question was how to provide it for hundreds of employees.

## The Solution

*"Our mission is to educate all learners for success, including the adult learners. As educators, how can we be systems thinkers and introduce action learning projects that really impact the entire organization?"*

— Dr. Matthew Wlodarczyk, Director of Professional Development

It started with the seed of an idea. How would it work if they could credential teachers in specific professional development areas based on their learning paths and what they choose to do? The initial investigation led to questions about how to implement micro-credentials, but it soon veered off in another direction.



### District Background

**LOCATION:** Stuart, Florida

**PRE-K ENROLLMENT:** 19,039

**FACILITIES:** 21

**STAFF:**

- Certified: 1,248
- Administrators: 60

### Demographics

- Caucasian/White: 55%
- Hispanic: 33%
- African-American/Black: 6.7%
- Asian: 1.8%
- Other: 3.3%



### Solutions Used

**Frontline Professional Growth**

- Professional Learning Management
- Learning & Collaboration Resources

A blended learning model, designed to optimize learning for individual employees by integrating in-person and online professional development, turned out to be the solution. Martin County chose it because of its adaptability for all learners. It has helped the district not only to adjust professional learning experiences due to school closures, but it also allows adult learners to have control over when, where, and at what pace they participate in job-embedded professional growth.

## The Results

*"While there's great content out there for us to use, we found more powerful content within our own district by observing teachers working with students in our community."*

— April Strong, District Instructional Coach

### THE START OF IT ALL

From the very beginning, the Professional Development team worked hand in hand with the Educational Technology and Instructional Services departments. Their common goal was to figure out how they could make the concept of blended learning work for the district.

To begin the first course creation, they had to consider what teachers needed to know and be able to do. From there, they could decide how many courses it would take and choose the most relevant topics. Focus groups gathered information and created plans. Literacy coaches worked with Professional Development staff to build courses in Frontline Professional Growth using Learning & Collaboration Resources to support teachers.

Anchored in research-based practices, Martin County's professional growth model initially launched with the implementation of a video program. Created to provide constructive feedback to teachers on their performance in the classroom, participation was voluntary. Teachers would record themselves and use Frontline to document reflections on their instructional strategies by annotating videos.

Participants met with other teachers from across the district to watch the videos and share feedback. That led to loading more and more content into Frontline, including courses for non-instructional staff.

Starting with 48 videos from that pilot program, the Martin County Professional Development team built a library of videos demonstrating effective teaching strategies – all modeled in Martin County classrooms.

### FULL SPEED AHEAD

*"The team has been flexible, moving with the changes, trying to figure out how to build our own content so that everyone at Martin County School District can improve."*

— April Strong

Heather and April collaborated on a two-pronged approach to develop a cutting-edge professional growth model for Martin County schools. Heather worked on building out courses and organizing the people who made the content, while April learned how to use Frontline to make it work. Their plan was to make their videos the foundational basis for learning and then to expand the concept to create content for other programs.

They've already completed more than 200 videos and offer over 25 courses through partnerships with departments across the school district. The course catalog that started with Balanced Literacy for K-5 teachers now includes courses on Social Emotional Learning, Microsoft Office, and New Hire Onboarding. Subject-area programs include options for math, social studies, and ESL. Either an informational video or interactive online class is now offered for every in-person learning opportunity previously available in the district.

*"I can't think of a department at this point that isn't creating content and embedding it in some way into a blended learning model."*

— April Strong

## WELCOME ABOARD!

*"The new onboarding project literally touches everybody coming into the district, whether you're a teacher, a bus driver, or a district administrator."*

– Drew Wessel, Coordinator of Administrative Technology

Human Resources is the newest and biggest partnership, with a comprehensive new-hire video series available through Frontline.

The innovative onboarding process for new employees gives Martin County an excellent opportunity to make a positive first impression. Every person hired into the Martin County system – each teacher, substitute, specialist, non-instructional worker, and new administrator – is introduced to the school district with "Welcome!" videos. The required introductory tasks and information needed by the district are embedded in the onboarding piece.

Benefits of the online model extend not only to the new hires but also to the Human Resources staff. Frontline tracks all the paperwork for them.

*"I'm happy we have Frontline for onboarding. We built an entire course that welcomes every new hire with a video from our superintendent. Along with that, the different tasks new hires need to complete are tracked so we know they've completed all those steps."*

– Alison Alvarez, Human Resources Manager

## BRIDGING THE GAP

The Microsoft Office training available through Frontline was the starting point for non-instructional staff. Since every Martin County employee has a Frontline login, they have immediate access and can learn to navigate the system to find any course they need. Digital learning opportunities have bridged the gap for operational or non-instructional staff, including bus drivers, secretaries, para-educators, and other staff members who are often left out of the loop as far as professional learning goes.

As part of the blended learning model, instructional coaches provide live professional development for non-instructional staff along with online courses. In-person professional development on teamwork with the maintenance staff, for example, was a challenge during the workday. For them, online instruction tends to be more accessible. Recent statute changes requiring all bus drivers and attendants to be CPR and First Aid certified can easily be addressed through blended online courses available to all staff members. In-person performance tasks are possible when performing CPR and first aid on a dummy, but the paper-pencil portion can be completed online.

Additional course offerings in Frontline for non-instructional employees are in the works. The ability to provide district-wide customer service training in-person and online allows a consistent message to be shared with all stakeholders. Looking at what's happening with the world right now, classes on time management and change management are critical.

## FEEDBACK AND FOLLOW-UP

*"We are always looking at how to provide actionable feedback, follow-up, and meet goals."*

– April Strong

Professional learning for certified staff doesn't end when a teacher completes a course. It's followed by coaching, goal setting, modeling, observing, and feedback. When school administrators engage in their own professional learning, district staff supports them with follow-up in their schools.

After teachers complete scheduled courses and independent learning and then submit their artifacts, they have to activate the coaching component. Coaches then provide feedback to teachers using reflection forms either in-person or online. A walkthrough tool provides a common language between teacher and coach, offering specific advice for teachers and principals about their implementation of new strategies.

## DATA TELLS THE STORY

After COVID-19 forced schools to close, a silver lining emerged. The professional development department realized that with over 200 of their own courses already loaded into their Frontline platform, in addition to the thousands of learning resources from Frontline, they could seamlessly shift to online learning for staff.

Not only that, but teachers and staff appreciate having options for how they learn just like the students do. They've realized the benefit of attending professional learning sessions at the time and place of their choice and are finding other ways to learn.

When the Balanced Literacy courses for K-5 teachers were first offered several years ago, the school board wanted progress updates. They required tracking the fidelity of implementation of the new program. Quarterly reports provided by the Professional Development department listed usage and completion data. They explained how the coaching cycle was designed to follow online learning and measure student growth.

A longitudinal review over the past three to four years of walkthrough data shows how instructional practices have changed over time, and overall data reflects an increase in the number of employees accessing online courses.

## HOW FRONTLINE SUPPORTS PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

Frontline Professional Growth is the home base. It's where employees go to log in to their learning plans, sign up for each learning event, and track the progression of learning. Points and transcripts live there, as do all artifacts and data connected with adult learning. Teachers and staff feel a sense of empowerment, knowing they have control over their learning with these tools.

Frontline is not just storing data but also helping launch learning opportunities into other areas that employees will discover. With the new hire course, for example, once users are in the program, they find links to other helpful resources they'll use throughout their employment at Martin County.

The capabilities of Frontline Professional Growth sometimes seem astounding. Both Professional Development and Educational Technology team members are often surprised and delighted when they learn new ways to customize the tools they didn't know were possible.

## ABOVE AND BEYOND

Through its collaboration with Educational Technology, Instructional Services, Human Resources, and other departments, Martin County has gone far above and beyond what other districts are doing with professional learning.

The Professional Development team leaders are supportive of their colleagues in HR and PD and recognize the effort, grit, and perseverance that instructional coach April Strong demonstrated in launching, building, and innovating within the Frontline platform. She guided the team through creating an effective blended learning platform for adults to provide a true opportunity for voice, choice, and growth.

Team members agree that collaboration among departments was one of the most rewarding components of the process. It's where they've seen the most growth and job satisfaction, which will lead to employee retention in the long run.

The Martin County team is proud of what they've accomplished. Never imagining where their first tentative steps into blended learning would lead, they are thrilled with the collaboration between departments that have historically operated independently. The robust professional learning model has created a common bond between many departments as they work together to support student and employee growth. Excited about what the future has in store, they are eagerly awaiting the next innovation in professional learning.



## About Frontline Education

**Frontline Education** is the leading provider of school administration software, empowering strategic K-12 leaders with the right tools, data and insights to proactively manage human capital, business operations, student information and special education.

Educational organizations representing over 80,000 schools and millions of educators, administrators and support personnel have partnered with Frontline Education in their efforts to develop the next generation of learners.

Frontline is dedicated to driving engagement across K-12 school systems and supporting the continuous improvement of employee effectiveness and efficiency with solutions for proactive recruiting and hiring, absence and time, professional growth, student information systems, special education and Medicaid reimbursement, school health management, payroll, benefits and financial management.

Frontline Education corporate headquarters are in Malvern, PA, with offices in Roseville, CA; Salinas, CA; Andover, MA; Walled Lake, MI; New York, NY; Rockville Centre, NY; Brecksville, OH and Austin, TX.