

Learning Power

Frequently Asked Questions



What is Learning Power? How did it come about?

Through funding from ExxonMobil, the National Math and Science Initiative has awarded nearly \$2 million to the South Dakota Collaborative for Advanced Placement for initiating Learning Power, a statewide pilot program offering high school students online Advanced Placement courses in math, science, and English.

Who is NMSI?

The National Math and Science Initiative, Inc. is an innovative non-profit organization created to facilitate the national scale-up of programs that have a demonstrated impact on math and science education in the United States. ExxonMobil provides funding for NMSI programs such as South Dakota's new Learning Power program.

Who is the South Dakota Collaborative for Advanced Placement?

The South Dakota Collaborative for Advanced Placement is comprised of state leaders from government, education, and economic communities. Together, these partners are developing a comprehensive plan that implements effective strategies for providing Advanced Placement math, science, and English courses to high school students via an online delivery system. The West River Foundation serves as the coordinator and fiscal agent for the collaborative. Dr. Jim Parry is named as the SDCAP and Learning Power Program Director.

Who benefits from the Learning Power program?

Public high school students (or home-school or private school high school students accessing the Learning Power program through a public high school) enrolled in AP courses in math, science, and English and online AP teachers across South Dakota can benefit from the pilot. The pilot provides monetary awards for students who earn scores of 3 or higher on the College Board AP course exam in the amount of \$100 per student. Students may receive more than one award for qualifying scores in multiple courses. In addition, the online AP teachers of awarded students receive monetary awards of \$100 for each of their students scoring 3 or higher. The program engages teachers and students as partners in achieving academic success as well as sharing in the award funds. Also, with AP courses under their belt, the pilot program positions participating students for greater success as they enter college or technical programs.

Do students taking AP courses need a guide?

Yes. A person within the school district monitors the student's progress, report grades to officials and offers support. Ideally, the guide would be familiar with the course content area.

Is there a need for the Learning Power program?

There are strong AP programs in place in many of South Dakota's larger high schools as well as a few other high schools. However, access to AP course opportunities is generally limited in small high schools,

especially in rural remote areas. In recent years, the South Dakota Department of Education has made AP courses available via distance through the E-learning Center at NSU. Also, AP courses are available through other public and private providers. Learning Power expands these opportunities to students by making identified AP courses available asynchronously (available 24 hours a day) and offering monetary awards for students earning qualifying scores.

Also, growing student enrollment in AP course opportunities can be accompanied by multiple benefits including:

- Students enhance their math, science, and English knowledge so they are better prepared for rigorous college courses and workforce expectations.
- Senior high school students could be challenged to stay more invested in their last year of studies rather than slacking off because they already meet graduation requirements.
- With more students on paths toward AP courses, there is healthy pressure in local schools to continue strengthening core subject matter in math, science, and English so students are prepared for AP courses.
- Learning Power capitalizes on online technology through the South Dakota Virtual School and NSU's E-learning Center so AP courses can be accessed from any location and at any time of day that is convenient for students.

What is the rationale for NMSI to support the Learning Power program?

Learning Power establishes South Dakota as a national model for engaging high school students across a rural state in AP math, science, and English courses through an online delivery system. NMSI provides the cash awards as a strategy to encourage more students to build their knowledge and consider career paths in math, science, and English. That supports NMSI's perspective that American students today are underperforming in math and science, and too many math and science teachers do not have the benefit of specific training and support in the math and science subjects they teach.

AP courses are an important component of high school curricula across South Dakota. Learning Power builds on current efforts by increasing the attention on AP offerings, especially in smaller high schools where participation in AP is significantly lower than larger high schools. By paying exam costs and cash awards for high scores on end-of-course exams and by making Learning Power AP courses available online via the South Dakota Virtual School, it is anticipated that the number of students engaged in AP courses across the state will expand appreciably.

Accessing an external provider, such as APEX Learning, has been a very effective strategy for some schools and their students to gain access to online AP courses in math, science, and English so why is South Dakota making the shift to the Learning Power program?

Learning Power offers several advantages perceived as important and valuable. For example:

- It affords South Dakota the opportunity to build its own capacity for meeting the ongoing online AP needs of students in the subject areas of math, science, and English.
- It capitalizes on resources that are already designated for the E-learning Center to provide distance learning opportunities for our state's students.
- It provides financial incentives to complement intrinsic incentives for students to take and score well on College Board course exams.

What courses will be offered by Learning Power?

Seven courses will be available online through the Learning Power program. The courses include: AP Calculus AB, AP English Literature and Composition, AP English Language and Composition, AP Biology, AP Physics B, AP Statistics, and AP Chemistry.

Who will teach the Learning Power courses?

The courses will be taught by a cohort of math, science, and English teachers from across South Dakota with a demonstrated record of effective teaching and experience integrating technology into their teaching methods. Four members of the cohort are teachers with the Northern State University's E-learning Center, and the other teachers will be recruited from local school districts.

Who will provide the Learning Power courses?

The courses will be available through the South Dakota Virtual School in cooperation with Northern State University's E-learning Center.

Is there a registration cost for Learning Power courses? Or, how are the Learning Power courses funded?

There is no registration cost for students or districts participating in the Learning Power program. The resources for providing the Learning Power courses are made available through the South Dakota Department of Education, Northern State University's E-learning Center, and the South Dakota Collaborative for Advanced Placement.

Who is eligible to take the Learning Power courses?

Public high school students (or home-school or private school high school students accessing the Learning Power program through a public high school) are eligible to take the courses. However, it should be noted that the AP courses are rigorous and require capable students with the necessary prerequisite knowledge and skills to facilitate success.

If online AP courses in math, science, and English are offered by providers other than Learning Power, are cash awards available for students?

No. The NMSI funds are only available to support the seven online courses offered by Learning Power through the South Dakota Virtual School in cooperation with NSU's E-learning Center.

Are the Learning Power cash awards available for students of AP courses in math, science, and English that are offered face-to-face by local school districts?

No. The NMSI funds are only available to support the seven online courses offered by Learning Power through the South Dakota Virtual School in cooperation with NSU's E-learning Center.

Are the Learning Power cash awards available for students of AP courses outside of math, science, and English?

No. NMSI funds are focused on math, science, and English only.

Will online math, science, and English AP courses be offered through APEX Learning?

The South Dakota Department of Education is in the process of securing a new contract with an online provider for the coming school year. Certainly, it is possible that the new contract will again be with APEX Learning. Whether the new contract is with APEX Learning or not, online AP courses in math, science, and English will ONLY be offered through the Learning Power program. Online AP courses in social sciences and world languages will still be offered through APEX Learning or another identified provider named by South Dakota Department of Education for the coming year.

Will online AP courses be offered through NSU's E-learning Center during 2008-2009?

Yes, but those courses will be made available through the Learning Power program. Online course instruction will be provided by NSU's E-learning Center, but the registration procedure will be handled through the South Dakota Virtual School and the Learning Power officials.

Are online AP courses in math, science, and English available to students for the summer of? If so, will those courses be available as part of the Learning Power program?

Learning Power courses begin in fall and will NOT be offered in the summer. However, students may register for online AP courses for summer 2008 via APEX Learning, the current online provider under contract by the South Dakota Department of Education. If students choose this option, they must be aware that only semester courses are offered during the summer. Thus, they would need to take the second semester of the online AP course in the fall via the online provider under contract by the Department. Students choosing this option for summer and fall are ineligible for Learning Power cash awards. If students forego the summer option and enroll for fall via the Learning Power opportunity, they will be eligible for the cash awards associated with scores of 3 or higher on the College Board Exams in the identified math, science, and English courses.

How does one learn more about the Learning Power program?

Information about courses and registration will be available at the South Dakota Virtual High School website. Also, school officials may contact Dr. Jim Parry, Learning Power program director, or MaryLou McGirr, Learning Power program coordinator, by phone at (605)394-1876 or via email at jparry@tie.net or mmcgirr@tie.net, respectively. The mailing address for Learning Power is 1925 Plaza Blvd., Rapid City, SD 57702.