

## BUILDING TODAY'S SKILLS FOR TOMORROW'S SUCCESS: HOW PETERSBURG SCHOOLS EMBRACE MODERN CHALLENGES



From the remote learning hurdles of 2020 to the thriving classrooms of 2024, Petersburg City Public Schools leverages Ignite by Hatch™ to deliver meaningful educational outcomes.

### The District

#### *Petersburg City Public Schools*

Located along the James River, Petersburg, Virginia, is a historical area that is home to many Revolutionary War sites. The city has a population of more than 33,000, and Petersburg City Public Schools serves 4,257 students across its seven schools. The large majority (94%) of the students in the school district are African American. All students, regardless of their socioeconomic status, receive free and reduced lunch. One of Petersburg's schools, Westview Early Childhood Education Center, is home to the Virginia Preschool Initiative program, Head Start, and an early childhood special education program. All of these early childhood programs provide full-day preschool for the district's youngest learners. Altogether, there are 425 preschool-age children (3- and 4-year-olds), across 24 classrooms, who attend Westview Early Childhood Education Center. One of the school's main goals is to prepare children to enter kindergarten.



### The Challenge

#### The need for a tool to support kindergarten readiness with technology

Dr. Stacie Parham is the principal of Westview Early Childhood Education Center. She has been in education for 25 years and has both a master's and doctorate degree in curriculum and instruction. When schools moved from in-person to virtual learning in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic, even the youngest learners in the Petersburg City Public Schools district were sent home with Chromebooks. As the remote 2020–2021 school year approached, Dr. Parham began to look for technology that could be used on students' Chromebooks that would continue to support kindergarten readiness even from home. Ultimately, Dr. Parham and her team settled on Hatch Early Learning's Ignite by Hatch™. Ignite is a digital learning platform anchored in a child-facing app that delivers engaging learning experiences through a dynamic digital-play environment. Ignite is built to promote children's growth and development across seven domains: Mathematics, Literacy, Language & Communication Development, Social and Emotional Learning, Science & Technology, Physical Development, and Social Studies. As children play the Ignite experiences, they move through a series of eight levels of skills in each domain that become progressively more rigorous.

## The Plan

### *Implementing Ignite by Hatch™*

Ignite was a perfect fit for Dr. Parham’s needs for the remote 2020–2021 school year; it is educational technology that supports kindergarten readiness and that children can use asynchronously at home. When children returned to the classroom for the 2021-2022 school year, Dr. Parham renewed Ignite as a resource that could be used in the classroom. Ignite was a great opportunity to continue to build children’s technology literacy and to provide opportunities for asynchronous learning in the classroom. Of course, there was also the added benefit of the Teaching Strategies GOLD® documentation that Ignite provides through its HatchSync® feature.



## Overcoming the Challenges of Implementing Technology in the Classroom

Often, there are challenges involved with implementing technology in the classroom, many of which Dr. Parham and her teachers faced with Ignite when returning to school in the fall of 2021. Teachers in the classroom struggled with rostering their students and saw that children needed more support to develop the mouse skills necessary to use Ignite on a Chromebook. To resolve these challenges, the Hatch team worked with the educators at Westview Early Childhood Education Center to support rostering students in Ignite, and classroom teachers worked with students to build their Chromebook mouse skills. Even throughout these challenges, there were always a few teachers who saw Ignite’s benefits, leading Dr. Parham to continue to advocate for Ignite.

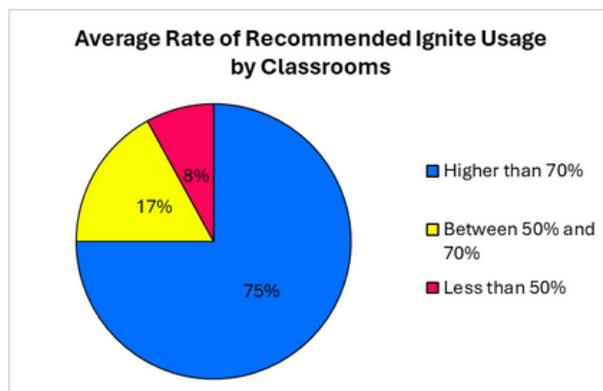
Dr. Parham decided to implement Ignite again in classrooms during the 2022–2023 school year. Her goals for Ignite usage in the classroom were to teach technology literacy, create small-group learning opportunities, build opportunities for asynchronous learning while teachers provided targeted practice for specific children, and be able to monitor children’s progress through a digital medium. Despite these important goals, classrooms faced challenges implementing Ignite for the recommended amount of time of 30 minutes each week, limiting its impact on instruction and the ability for educators to gain insight into children’s true progress. The primary challenge was that teachers needed more support and encouragement to use Ignite on a regular basis. These were challenges that Dr. Parham and the Hatch team felt could be overcome.

## Building Strong Implementation of Technology in the Classroom

In the 2023–2024 school year, Dr. Parham took three steps to foster strong implementation. First, she included Ignite usage in her goals for the school year. Second, she took an active role in supporting rostering by helping to take pictures of children that could be uploaded to Ignite, ensuring that the Chromebooks were charged and ready to be used, and helping teaching assistants receive Ignite logins to support the other teacher in the classroom. Finally, Dr. Parham monitored each class’s Ignite progress, used her daily announcements to speak about the amount of time that Ignite was used, and celebrated classrooms that had strong Ignite usage. In a recent conversation,

Dr. Parham explained, “I would shout out classrooms with strong [Ignite] usage, I would shout out classrooms whose usage was more limited, and I would encourage these classrooms to use Ignite. Shouting out top Ignite classrooms and students drove other classrooms to use Ignite, too!” The more Dr. Parham celebrated Ignite usage, the more that classrooms used Ignite. Eventually, caregivers caught wind of Ignite usage, such that families started using Ignite at home as a safe and effective technology experience.

All of this hard work with Ignite implementation by the educators at Westview Early Childhood Education Center and the students’ caregivers paid off. Hatch Early Learning recommends that each child engage with Ignite for 30 minutes per week, for a total of 15 hours across 9 months of the school year. In the 2023–2024 school year, Westview Early Childhood Education Center’s Ignite usage was strong. Most classrooms (18 out of 24) used Ignite for 70% or more of the recommended time.



## The Impact

### *Ignite supported educators in understanding children’s learning*

With this strong usage, Dr. Parham and the other educators at Westview Early Childhood Education Center truly saw the value of Ignite. The educators used the reports generated in Insights by Hatch™, which demonstrate children’s Ignite progress, to have a more complete picture of their students. Dr. Parham explained, “Using Ignite this year [with strong implementation] and overseeing it opened my eyes a little more. Just meeting with the teachers and reviewing their data, we could see what our children were able to do.” Ignite opened educators’ eyes in multiple ways. For example, teachers often found that children who tended to be more shy and participated less in large group settings were able to demonstrate their understanding and knowledge in the individual setting with Ignite. Additionally, teachers had a deeper view of their students’ knowledge, which helped provide further insight into children’s scores on more standardized assessments. Moreover, the strong Ignite implementation meant that teachers in the classroom could better use Ignite’s instructional resources, such as its offline activities, and easily see groups of children who were experiencing challenges with the same skills. Dr. Parham reflected that this strong implementation helped reveal to teachers “all the ways that Ignite could really help [them] in assisting their children.”

Moving into the 2024–2025 school year, Dr. Parham has continued brainstorming more ways to increase the impact Ignite can have on instruction. She plans to have teachers share the progress children make in Ignite in the classroom with intervention specialists. These specialists will then use this information to provide targeted practice. She hopes that interventionists will use Ignite offline instructional resources to support children’s learning and growth. We at Hatch cannot wait to see the continued ways that Petersburg City Public Schools continues to benefit from, and use Ignite.

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