



CASE STUDY: DENVER ACADEMY
ENSURING ACCESS TO PROJECT-ORIENTED, TECHNOLOGY-RICH EXPERIENCES



The team at Denver Academy, a small independent school in Colorado, wanted to provide their students with experiences where they could work in a project-oriented, technology-rich environment.

With the funding support from the Campos EPC Foundation and Marco Campos, a parent who is committed to ensuring students have access to technology and complementary programming, the Denver Academy team worked with the SmartLab Learning team to plan and launch their new STEM SmartLab HQ in August 2019.



After students spent a few months working in this curriculum-driven, technology-rich environment, we asked Thomas Laird, the Denver Academy SmartLab HQ Facilitator, to tell us about the

skills students were gaining.

SmartLab: How has SmartLab Learning helped students grow academically?

LAIRD: I've found that students who struggle with reading don't seem to struggle as much in the SmartLab HQ because they're so inspired about what they're building, designing, and creating that they want to read more about it. Additionally, since students record their work in their Digital Portfolio, they're even improving their writing, spelling, and typing skills.

SmartLab: How has SmartLab Learning helped students grow emotionally?

LAIRD: One of the most impactful strategies with SmartLab Learning is the "3B4ME" philosophy, which encourages students to seek answers from at least three sources before they come to me. This approach has helped students become more self-motivated and proactive problem-solvers. Even the most timid students are gaining confidence in finding resources and strategies for success.

STUDENTS WHO
STRUGGLE WITH
READING ... WANT
TO READ MORE



SmartLab: What's one of the biggest ahas students have had since being in the SmartLab HQ?

LAIRD: The students have become confident learners and now know that making mistakes and taking risks in the SmartLab HQ leads to amazing solutions. Now, they're builders and experimenters, and spending time in a SmartLab HQ is one of their favorite parts of the day.



SmartLab: What changes have you seen in your students' behavior?

LAIRD: In a SmartLab HQ, students are constantly shifting gears to work on a variety of new projects. This rotation has been hard for one student who wanted to work on one project rather than moving on to the next. As the weeks have gone on, I've seen the student learn to let go of that need and be more willing to move through the rotation.

SmartLab: How has being a SmartLab Facilitator changed your teaching style?

LAIRD: I've learned a couple of valuable lessons:

1. Letting go of a teacher role and becoming a facilitator is challenging at times and can frustrate students. But ultimately, that's a good thing because it teaches students to use the "3B4ME" approach. After they do that, I can use that as a true teaching opportunity.
2. Don't be afraid to teach something you don't understand fully. In a SmartLab HQ, students can teach you; we can all learn together. So have fun—experiment!

SmartLab: As a SmartLab Facilitator, how do you keep the lab running smoothly?

LAIRD: Here are some keys to my success:

1. Stay organized—including labeling different components in the lab. I also set clear expectations of how students should handle tools and materials, which is an incredible opportunity for students to learn responsibility. I've found that students want to keep tools and materials mostly intact so they can continue their work the next day.
2. Use the online resources in the SmartLab Learning Hub. Also, I encourage students to update their Portfolio as soon as they complete a project because doing so will help them stay on track.

Denver Academy is an independent private school located in Colorado. It is one of the top schools in the nation dedicated to serving diverse learners, including those with dyslexia and ADD.

2-12

Grades served

390

Students

