CITES | Virtual Learning Project

Virtual School Program Profiles

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Center on Inclusive Technology & Education Systems

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CAST

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Background Information

The CITES Virtual Learning Project was conceived by a recommendation of the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Special Education (OSEP) evaluation panel. The evaluation occurred in the summer of 2020, after schools had to scramble to provide remote instruction to students during the height of the pandemic. The primary goal of this project was to engage with established virtual schools, districts with virtual programs, and organizations dedicated to virtual learning, to learn about promising practices related to educating and supporting students with disabilities and their families. Central to this work was identifying what technologies are used in these settings and how students who require assistive technology to access instruction were supported. Equally important is understanding how teachers and families were supported to use the technology tools effectively for inclusive teaching and learning.

About This Work

These school profiles provide an overview of five distinct virtual learning programs including a state department of education virtual program, statewide charter virtual programs, a district charter school, and a single school district that offers courses both online and in-person. The goal of this resource is to provide the reader with various perspectives of how virtual programs implement learning opportunities for students with disabilities and how these students are supported with assistive technologies and accessible educational materials. For each school the overview provides details related to the overall school mission, demographics, delivery model, curriculum and professional learning practices. Specific to students with disabilities there are sections on Assistive Technology & Accessible Educational Materials, IEP/504 plans, special education supports and the school's accessibility statement.

The following schools' profiles are included in this report:

- Garnet Valley School District, PA
- Greater Commonwealth Virtual School, MA
- Mountain Heights Academy, UT
- North Carolina Virtual Public School, NC
- Virtual Learning Academy Charter School, NH

About CAST

CAST is a nonprofit education research and development organization that created the Universal Design for Learning framework and UDL Guidelines, now used the world over to make learning more inclusive. Find us at www.cast.org.

eSchool@GarnetValley

A Virtual School Hosted by Garnet Valley School District

> "When you have the percentage of students who have the special education needs that we do, it's ingrained in them from a young age that everybody's included here, which is awesome."
> — Samuel Mormando, Director of Technology, Garnet Valley School District

Overview

eSchool@GarnetValley is a local public school in Glen Mills, Pennsylvania, for students in grades K–12. In 2015, Garnet Valley District expanded its educational offerings to include original credit, accelerated, and credit recovery options via online and blended learning formats. The online and blended courses are open to all K–12 students who reside within the district boundaries regardless of learning style, background, or special education needs. eSchool@GarnetValley courses are available to students who attend district schools, local charter or cyber charter schools, and summer courses are available to students living outside of the district. This video provides an overview of the program.

School Goals/Mission Statement

The [mission of the eSchool@GarnetValley is the same as the Garnet Valley School District](): To provide quality education opportunities for all. In pursuit of this mission, the Garnet Valley School District will:

- Exude enthusiasm for the learning process.
- Address the unique needs of each learner.
- Provide all students with a solid educational foundation for life-long learning.
- Help students develop their thinking skills.
- Prepare students for responsible citizenship in a world of constant change.
- Develop a high-performing workforce.

Delivery Model

eSchool@GarnetValley offers regular credit, continuous learning courses, and accelerated and credit-recovery options in online and blended learning formats throughout the school year and over the summer.

Garnet Valley offers multiple models, including:

- Virtual:
  - Asynchronous: Learning does not require interaction with others to occur at the same time. Students in Garnet Valley's eSchool@GarnetValley program access their coursework with the district's Learning Management System (LMS), Schoology. Interaction and communication in other asynchronous programs may happen through forums, blogs, email, website links, or other contexts where learners may participate within a wider, more flexible range of times when other participants are not actively present in the same moment. Source [Online Teaching Standards]()
  - Synchronous: Students may access online courses in real-time along with students receiving brick-and-mortar instruction.
  - [GV Virtual](): New for the 2022–23 school year, the Garnet Valley school district will offer GV Virtual which is a full time, synchronous virtual

learning format for K–5 students. This program is in addition to the eschool@Garnetvalley program.

- o Blended Learning: At Garnet Valley's eSchool Studio, students complete work on campus, socialize with other students, meet with their guidance counselor, and get help with coursework. All eSchool@GarnetValley students have the option to complete work at home, in any one of the school's newly redesigned libraries, or in the eSchool Studio.
- o Staffing: 4 instructional coaches in the district rotate between the five schools. One day per week (Monday–Thursday), they cover the eSchool Studio. The space closes on Fridays for coaches to collaborate amongst themselves.
- Hybrid Learning: Some of the students attend school in person, others participate synchronously via live stream. One student attends from home while a robot, attached to an iPad, attends the class.
- Full time and Part-Time Options:
  - o Only 50 students are enrolled full-time out of 800 students.
  - o Out-of-district students can only enroll in summer courses and thus are part-time only.

Note: The eSchool Studio is a classroom space in one of the elementary schools. Based on feedback from students (at that time enrollment was all high school (HS) students they didn't want the space in the HS. Students joined the virtual program for several reasons, some because of school phobia or other issues so putting the space in the elementary school made sense. Currently, space in another building is being remodeled to accommodate the eSchool Studio.

Students

- 4,600 students in the district
- 21% students with disabilities
- During the 2021–2022 school year, 50 students took 100% of their courses online and approximately two-thirds of these students have an IEP.
- 800 students take one or more virtual courses

- All 1,800 high school students take classes in a blended format (100 virtual, the rest take traditional face-to-face courses, with one hour each day blended).

Graduation Rates

eSchool@GarnetValley is part of the Garnet Valley School District, which reports a 97% graduation rate (top 5% in PA). Ninety-five percent of graduates will continue their formal education.

State Test Scores

Pennsylvania System of School Assessment (PSSA):

- Math Proficiency: 83% (top 5%)
- Reading Proficiency: 87% (top 5%)

All students are required to take the Pennsylvania System of School Assessment. "Keystone Exams are state-mandated end-of-course tests. Students are required to take the appropriate Keystone Exam at the conclusion of each Keystone course (Algebra I, Biology, and English Literature. English Literature is tied to English 10)." (source: student manual).

Technology

- Learning Management System (LMS): Schoology
- School Information System (SIS): Alma integrated with IEP Writer so IEPs live in both systems and all teachers have access to the filing cabinet in Alma.
- Devices: Every student receives both an iPad and a Chromebook. Other technology is provided as needed.

Curriculum & Course Offerings

eSchool@GarnetValley offers the same Garnet Valley courses that are offered in the district's traditional face-to-face classrooms. This includes advanced courses, traditional, elective, and credit recovery courses, electives, and credit recovery options.

Students also have the option to take college-level courses via partnerships with higher education institutions. Details are provided in the student manual.

In-House Developed Courses

Teachers develop the curriculum based on Pennsylvania standards and courses are vetted by the administration team. Every course goes through an intensive audit to make sure it follows the end-of-course rubric (which is built using the Quality Matter rubric for K–12).

All courses are taught using the same curriculum offered in three formats: virtual, blended, or face to face.

Garnet Valley course development has a four-step process, including:

- Instructional Design
- Curriculum Design
- Resource Design
- Course Design

After designing the course, the district contracts with SensusAccess in Denmark to digitize the materials. It takes about two years to fully develop a robust, accessible course.

Purchased Courses

eSchool@GarnetValley does not purchase any courses.

Considerations for Students with Special Needs

Who is Responsible for the IEP and 504 Plans?

Since eSchool@GarnetValley is part of the Garnet Valley School District, the school is responsible for writing and implementing the IEP and 504 plans for students with disabilities. The district staff also provides ancillary services, such as occupational and speech therapy. Students can often engage with these services virtually, but occasionally the team advises parents to bring their child to school for such services.

Assistive Technology/Accessible Educational Materials

Garnet Valley is responsible for supplying assistive technology to students. Based on a partnership with the Pennsylvania Intermediate Unit (PAIU) the district tests and vets a variety of assistive technologies for students. Students with a variety of needs work directly with the PAIU to secure assistive technologies based on personal needs. The district does provide text to speech tools for all students.

Accessible Materials: Teachers use [Schoolology's Accessible Template](#) to create curricula. In addition, students can leverage accessibility features available via their iPads and Chromebooks, as well as the accessibility features that are integrated into the Schoology LMS, such as text-to-speech.

Special Education Support

All students who attend Garnet Valley schools are provided services in the least restrictive environment. Processes and procedures exist to ensure [special education programming](#) in the regular education classroom is the first consideration. To ensure the delivery of services in the least restrictive environment, the teams consider the provision of supplementary aids and services such as: assistive technology, functional behavioral assessment with a positive behavior support plan, consultation with outside experts, professional development for teachers, paraprofessional support in class, more intensive direct instruction, etc. Supports are provided based on individual student needs, and supports are no different for online courses.

Staff:

- 1 special education director
- 6 special education district support staff leaders
- Special education teachers and assistants based on the number of students with special needs

Accessibility Statement

The Pennsylvania School Code requires each school district to develop and implement a special education plan, aligned with the strategic plan. The district's main web page

includes a section devoted to special education and provides a link to the special education plan, which applies to students who take online courses.

Professional Development

The district includes eight instructional coaches who are primarily responsible for staff professional learning. The Professional Development Plan is developed and revised regularly.

- All new teachers work with an instructional coach during their first year.
- All eSchool@GarnetValley teachers are trained in Effective Digital Instruction (EDI). The EDI training focuses on using best teaching practices and leveraging technology to design and deliver content to students in any format. Teachers learn the importance of developing opportunities for building interactions, designing experiences, presenting content, and authentically and purposefully using technology tools to provide students the best learning experiences, whether it be in the brick-and-mortar classroom, blended courses, or entirely online.
  The four EDI themes include:
    - Designing Learning Experiences
    - Building Interactions
    - Presenting Content
    - Accessibility/Differentiation
- Online support resources are available to all teachers, including resources to support a hybrid teaching model.
- Teachers are paid to complete the EDI and Open Education Resources professional learning. They also receive compensation to write or revise the curriculum, then translate it to a digitized course. In general, a one-credit class costs approximately $13,000 for the entire process. The money is paid directly to the teacher(s) who works on the course. Money typically spent on purchasing textbooks can be reallocated to pay teachers for professional development and course development. Prior to digitization, eSchool@GarnetValley spent between $250,000 to $400,000 on textbooks.

Student-Centered Beliefs

The Garnet Valley School District understands families in today's complex society need flexibility and options to meet their child's individual educational needs. It is understood that working with one of the top school districts in the country that includes high-quality, certified, innovative teachers is also important. See Academics at eSchool@GarnetValley.

Course Flexibility & Support

eSchool@GarnetValley courses use real-time and asynchronous collaboration tools as part of the course design and assessment. Students have the option to complete work at home, in any one of our school's newly redesigned libraries, or in the eSchool Studio.

Students interact with their teachers on a regular basis via email, through the communication section of their classes (audio/video, virtual classroom), AND during scheduled face-to-face times.

The same Special Education services are offered in eSchool@GarnetValley courses as in regular brick-and-mortar schools. Additionally, all eSchool@GarnetValley students have access to all counseling services.

All eSchool@GarnetValley students must **complete five hours per week per class and/or stay on pace** to meet their attendance requirements. Students will be marked absent from school for failure to meet these requirements.

Greater Commonwealth Virtual School

"One of the things we've identified as a strong need for us to really succeed as virtual schools is, you absolutely need to create hybrid models where you allow for in-person instruction and support. We worked to bring some students who are truly in need of intervention to the buildings and did notice a positive change in engagement and progress."
— Salah Khelfaoui, Executive Director, Greater Commonwealth Virtual School

Overview

Greater Commonwealth Virtual School (GCVS), a Commonwealth Virtual School (CMVS), is a full-time, public, fully virtual K–12 school governed by a board of trustees, all of whom are appointed by the Massachusetts state commissioner of education. It is an autonomous school district that operates independently. As a public school of choice, GCVS is open to all students in the state. Promotional video.

School Goals/Mission Statement

"The Greater Commonwealth Virtual School, a public school of choice, serves students from across Massachusetts who need a learning community that is accessible and flexible. We give our students and their families choices in what, how, when, and where they learn.

"As a pioneer of online personalized learning, we empower our educators to tailor learning experiences to each student's strengths, interests, and challenges. We redefine and change how students and teachers engage through innovative technology, while ensuring mastery of competencies embedded in a rigorous curriculum." Mission Statement Online

Delivery Model

GCVS, a fully virtual, full-time school open to all Massachusetts students in grades K–12, offers two models for learners: GCVS Live or GCVS Flex. GCVS also has a dual enrollment opportunity for students to take college level courses while still in high school. GCVS curriculum covers core academic subjects in grades K–12, offers AP courses, and includes elective courses, such as art, physical education, music, and social activities.

- Virtual
    - Asynchronous: for students grades 6–12 whose applications are approved
    - Synchronous: classes ranging between 10–30 students meet virtually on a regular schedule. These classes are videotaped allowing students to view them later.
- Full time is the only option

Students

Academic Year 2023: grades K–12

- 1,200 students
- 27% students with disabilities

Graduation Rates

Academic Year 2020–2021: Of 124 students in the graduating class, 48% graduated, 18% remained in school, 7% took the high school equivalent exam, and 27% dropped out.

State Test Scores

GCVS is authorized by the Massachusetts Board of Elementary and Secondary Education and meets or exceeds all state and federal guidelines. As with all public school students in Massachusetts, Greater Commonwealth Virtual School students are evaluated on achievement of academic standards by taking the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System exam (MCAS) and the Assessing Comprehension and Communication in English State-to-State for English Language Learners (ACCESS).

In 2021, participation in the state assessment, MCAS, varied across grade levels. Approximately 93% of the elementary students, 86% of middle school students, and 47% of 10th grade students participated. Performance was just slightly below the state mean across the board, apart from grade 10 ELA, which was above. All students are required to take the assessments in person.

GCVS is authorized by the Massachusetts Board of Elementary and Secondary Education and meets or exceeds all state and federal guidelines. As with all public school students in Massachusetts, Greater Commonwealth Virtual School students are evaluated on achievement of academic standards by taking the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System exam, also known as the MCAS.

Technology

- Learning Management System (LMS): Schoology
- School Information System (SIS): Power School (not linked to the IEP); Frontline/ESPed is used for IEP documentation and storage.
- Devices: Chromebooks are provided to each student who requests one.

Curriculum & Course Offerings

- Live course offerings for the
  - Elementary grades include English Language Arts, Science, Social Studies, Mathematics, Physical Education, Art, and Music

- Middle school grades include English Language Arts, Science, Social Studies, Mathematics, Art, Music, Technology, and Physical Education Health and Wellness
- High school include English Language Arts, Science, History, Mathematics, Languages, Fine Arts, Music, and Physical Education Health and Wellness
- Course offerings for the asynchronous Flex Program offered to students 6–12 can be found at GCVS Flex Course Catalog and Program of Studies.
- Sample lessons are not available.

In-House Developed Courses

GCVS uses FlexPoint Education (formerly FLVS) curriculum materials as a base for its courses. Teachers supplement with other resources to build lessons that are more interactive and aligned with MA Curriculum Standards.

Purchased Courses

GCVS purchases its courses from two organizations, all of which are accredited through Cognia.

- Edgenuity (primary source of asynchronous and live courses, Imagine Learning is the parent company), which has achieved Corporate Systems Accreditation with Supplemental Digital Learning under Cognia.
- FlexPoint (former Florida Virtual School), which is accredited through Cognia.

Teachers adapt materials when curricula are not fully aligned with the state standards.

Considerations for Students with Special Needs

Who is responsible for the IEP and 504 plan?

GCVS is responsible for writing and implementing the IEP and 504 plans for all students with disabilities. Presence Learning is contracted to provide online ancillary services such as speech and language pathology, occupational therapy. Presence Learning staff includes 4 Occupational Therapists, 4 Speech and Language Therapists,

and 2 Psychologists. All counseling is provided by in-house Adjustment Counselors. Physical therapy services are sought outside of the virtual environment when needed.

Assistive Technology/Accessible Educational Materials

The Director of Special Education and Presence Learning staff make AT and AEM recommendations. Assistive Technology assessments result in various equipment recommendations, such as ergonomic mouse, mouse pad, and keyboard, screen overlay, or enlarged format Chromebooks. FM systems and noise-canceling headphones have been provided to students who have hearing loss. In addition, students and families can request hardware assistance, such as audio amplification systems and large-screen laptops. During the interview, an administrator spoke of going online with a parent to order equipment that was deemed beneficial to the student.

Assistive technologies, such as the ability to highlight text, text-to-speech/speech-to-text, enlarged font, and keyboarding options, are options commonplace in the virtual setting.

Special Education Support

Staff:

- Special Education Director 1
- Administrative Assistant 1 full-time, 1 part-time
- Special Education Teachers 24 (2 substantially separate classrooms)
- Special Education Paraprofessionals
    - SY 21–22 3 full time, 1 part time
    - SY 22–23 6 full time, 1 part time

The school explicitly expresses a commitment to tailoring accessibility to meet the individual needs of each student, including connecting students with assistive technologies and supports. All students receive a Chromebook, and students and families can further request assistive technology hardware as noted above. The Schoology LMS provides basic accessibility supports, including line reader tools, text-to-speech, response accommodations, highlighting tools, alternative background and

font colors, magnifiers, and answer masking. Read the GCVS statement on special education technology.

Accessibility Statement

The GCVS accessibility statement focuses on the use of technology to meet the needs of students with disabilities.

Professional Development

As indicated during the interview, professional development is offered on various topics based on needs. For example, when a new LMS system is adopted, vendors provide training to all teachers. Teachers who emerge as leaders in understanding and using the features are asked to continue providing additional PD.

Student-Centered Beliefs

GCVS has an accountability plan, which was developed with its partners at the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. GCVS serves many students whose needs were not met in a more traditional setting. The accountability plan lays out the measures of success that are in line with the mission statement, and which address students' needs. Here are the goals of the accountability plan's goals are:

- We will measure student growth toward grade-level mastery by using the Star 360 Math and Reading tests four times a year. Students who are at risk of not meeting end-of-year benchmarks will have access to additional resources.
- Our English Language Learners and Students with Disabilities will meet their annual goals.
- Teachers will build accessible lessons using UDL parameters as well as student feedback, so that lessons are personalized. Parents and students report satisfaction with the personalized learning.
- Teachers are leaders in the world of online learning. To learn more, visit the GCVS Accountability Plan webpage.

Course Flexibility & Support

All GCVS courses are fully online, with flexibility built in for where and when course work is completed (within stated parameters). Students are paired with GCVS faculty and meet during class (with GCVS Live) and during appointments (with GCVS Live and Flex) to assess student progress and to develop any adjustments to a learner's plan. In addition, a learning center for in-person support is available for students. In FY23 the school will return to offering meet ups, which include in-person outings and field trips.

GCVS calls out the importance of community collaboration, including learners, families, teachers, and technology support, for student success, as well as the need for personalization and flexibility for learners (source: GCVS).

Mountain Heights Academy

Mountain Heights Academy
LEADERS IN DIGITAL EDUCATION

> "My favorite story is when a dad literally sat back and started crying and said, 'I've had to fight for every little accommodation in every single setting for my son. This is the first time I have not had to fight.'"
> — Delaina Tonks, Mountain Heights Academy Principal

Overview

Mountain Heights Academy (MHA) was founded in 2009 to meet the needs of students and families looking for an alternative to traditional schools. MHA, an online public charter school, offers a no fee, tuition-free, full-time program to Utah students in grades 7–12. MHA is also an approved course provider for Utah's Statewide Online Education Program (SOEP,) a program, in which any Utah student, including those with disabilities, can take individual courses during the school year or summer, while maintaining their status at their school of primary enrollment. MHA functions as its own Local Education Agency. View this video to learn more about MHA.

School Goals/Mission Statement

"As the leader in digital education, our mission is to develop connected and successful learners.

Our school goals include:

- Improve student success
- Develop a robust and connected community
- Increase our Open Education Resource (OER) impact

Students who graduate from Mountain Heights Academy are more prepared for life in the 21st century and are:

- well-versed in the latest technology,
- comfortable with new applications,
- and have mastered the critical skills of time management."

Delivery Model

- Virtual
  - Asynchronous: Students may access online content in real-time or receive face-to-face instruction individually or in small groups, using the same educational system. There are optional weekly "live sessions" for each class where the teacher directs reviews, extracurricular learning, answers questions, and engages students in class discussions.
  - In-person meeting opportunities and activities, including field trips and extracurricular activities
- Full-time and part-time

Students

Academic Year 2020–2021: grades 7–12

- 1,200 full-time
- >500 part-time students (Part-time students attending Utah district schools are eligible to take up to four credits online)
- 17% of the full-time students have IEPs, 12.5% have 504 plans
- 96% of students on IEPs fall in the categories of autism, specific learning disabilities, and other health impairment.

Graduation Rates

Mountain Heights Academy has the highest Statewide Online Education Program (SOEP) passing rate, at 96%. (2021: State 79%, MHA 88%; 2020: State 82%, MHA 97%).

The graduation rate for their full-time students is between 79% and 84%. (2018–2021: State 86–89%.)

State Assessment

Utah students take assessment tests each spring. Students take the RISE, ASPIRE+, and ACT exams. Mountain Heights Academy students have traditionally performed well on state tests, and the school is consistently the top-ranked online charter school in the state determined by state test scores, graduation rates, and completion rates (there are 8–10 online-only or online charter schools depending upon the year).

State assessments are proctored, and therefore students must participate in-person, not virtually. In Utah, state assessments are optional, and many parents opt their students out of testing. MHA continues to look for ways to incentivize parents to bring their children to participate in state assessments.

Technology

- Learning Management System (LMS): Open LMS via Blackboard
- School Information System (SIS): Genius SIS, paired with Zappee, which houses student information and notes.
- IEP and 504 Management System: Embrace
- Devices: A Chromebook is provided to each student. All applicable tools are cloud-based and can be accessed by any device.

Curriculum & Course Offerings

MHA offers an entire middle and high school curriculum including core, elective, honors, and AP classes. In addition, MHA partners with Utah universities to offer concurrent college credit for eligible high school juniors and seniors. Students also have the option to take classes and earn certifications at various technical colleges across the state.

MHA students participate in optional service learning projects that benefit the community. For example, MHA schedules appointments for their students to read books to the students at local elementary schools to celebrate Reading Day every

spring. Each year, 250 books are donated to the schools that invite them to come and read to their students.

In-House Developed Courses

As a pioneer in [Open Education Resources](#) (OER), following in the footsteps of Harvard and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, MHA was the first secondary school in the world to create and publicly release its own curriculum freely available as OER for educators to remix and reuse. Teachers create the curriculum from existing openly licensed content and teacher-created materials. All courses are aligned to Utah core standards. In addition, concurrent enrollment in college or university level courses are available online through partnerships with certain Utah institutions of higher education, as well as technical colleges.

A curriculum director oversees the process of ongoing course development and instructional coaches fine-tune courses throughout the year. Teachers are paid per course they develop. MHA has a robust hiring process, in which prospective teachers develop a lesson during the interview process to demonstrate their instructional design skills. Each teacher has the ability to personalize content to meet students' needs.

Once a course is developed, the process involves running an accessibility check through the LMS and adjusting as needed.

[MHA provides these sample lessons.](#) Teacher-created materials are aligned to state core standards. Students and families may access the [course catalog online](#).

Purchased Courses

MHA occasionally purchases courses when student needs cannot be met through OER. For example, they use a purchased keyboarding course.

Considerations for Students with Special Needs

"Our special education team (SPED) works tirelessly with our students to be confident self-advocates, so they can be successful adults after they transition out of high school. I personally place a high emphasis on the wellbeing of our students with disabilities (SWD) population. Whatever the SPED team or students need, we provide it to them. As a side note, our state does reviews of our SPED program every couple of years. The ratings are on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being the best and 5 being the one that needs the most improvement. We have had a 2 for the past couple of years, and in 2022 we received a 1. These students matter to us, and we do our very best to serve them."
— DeLaina Tonks, School Principal).

Who is responsible for the IEP and 504 plan?

MHA is responsible for writing and implementing IEPs and 504 plans for full-time students. MHA coordinates the IEP process with its special education director, parents, students, and general ed teachers, then implements that plan collaboratively. Ancillary services, such as occupational therapy and speech and language pathology, are provided via a contract with a service organization. A school counselor oversees the creation and implementation of 504 plans in conjunction with parents, students, general education teachers, and administrators.

For part-time students, the school of record is responsible for writing the IEP/504 plan; an MHA representative may attend the IEP/504 if necessary, and teachers receive the IEP/504 in order to address and implement recommendations.

Assistive Technology/Accessible Educational Materials

Mountain Heights Academy is responsible for supplying assistive technology and accessible materials to its students.

Examples of assistive technologies they have provided include:

- Audio amplification systems
- Large-screen laptops preset for larger fonts
- Noise-canceling headphones to help reduce distractions
- Text-to-speech tools

In addition, MHA uses tools embedded in Chrome OS to provide accessible options to their students, which are included in Google Hangouts for live meetings.

Examples include:

- Live captions
- Speech-to-text and Text-to-speech
- Screen reader
- High contrast

Special Education Support

MHA follows all necessary requirements in the development and delivery of individualized education programs (IEPs) for eligible students. Placement in the least restrictive environment (LRE) will be implemented to the maximum extent appropriate for students with special needs. MHA provides a continuum of placements to address the needs of students with disabilities to ensure those students receive special education and related services appropriate to their needs. Access the Special Education Policies & Procedures Handbook.

MHA's Department of Special Education consists of:

- 1 Special Education Director
- 14 Special Education Teachers
- 10 Special Education Paraprofessionals
- The teacher-to-student ratio is ~ 1:13 and the para-to-student ratio is 1:18, showing a commitment to small caseloads.

Accessibility Statement

Found in the Special Education Policies & Procedures Manual, the statement reads:

"It is the policy of Mountain Heights Academy to adhere to and comply with federal and state laws and rules as they pertain to students with disabilities and the provision of a free, appropriate public education to all students within the school, regardless of the nature or severity of the disability."

Professional Development

Onboarding for new teachers includes assigning a mentor teacher/anchor teacher. Mentors contact and meet with each new teacher as often as is needed until they are comfortable in their role. Each teacher is a member of a department with a department team lead who continues to mentor and manage the team.

MHA has a written Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) for each technology tool. A library of tutorials created by instructional coaches can be accessed 24/7.

Coaches are also available for department meetings or individual appointments to provide coaching on technology tools.

At every whole school, in-person, professional development meeting, several "Ignite" sessions are offered. During these sessions, teachers demonstrate technology tools and/or pedagogy best practices to leverage technology's promise to improve education. Sessions are recorded and placed in the tutorial library for future reference.

Student-Centered Beliefs

Traditional brick and mortar schools just don't work for every student. Mountain Heights Academy understands that and was founded to provide a better solution.

- Flexibility — Schoolwork is divided into weekly modules that empower students with the freedom and flexibility to complete their assignments when and where they choose within each week.
- Unparalleled teacher support — Students receive regular one-on-one interaction with teachers and can contact them during daily office hours for help through live video call, real-time messaging, or by phone.
- Customized Education — Teachers customize the curriculum to meet individual students' needs.

- Extracurricular opportunities — Through events such as service-learning activities, field trips, and school dances, students have many opportunities for face-to-face social activities outside of school. Mountain Heights Academy is a service-learning school. Students and faculty were recipients of individual President's Volunteer Service Awards, recognizing many hours of individual service. To date, Mountain Heights has provided a cumulative total of over 105,500 hours of service. In 2020–2021, Mountain Heights students, faculty, board members, and parents logged 10,500 hours, providing services in various areas across Utah.
- Leadership opportunities — Students have many opportunities to develop leadership skills, including joining the National Honor Society and National Junior Honor Society, serving as student body officers, and participating in clubs.

It is the policy of Mountain Heights Academy to adhere to and comply with federal and state laws and rules as they pertain to students with disabilities and the provision of a free, appropriate public education to all students within the school, regardless of the nature or severity of the disability. In support of this, they provide easy access for anyone to review the [federal regulations, which are available on their website](#).

Course Flexibility & Support

Teachers have the ability to customize the OER curricula to best meet the needs of individual students. Schoolwork is divided into weekly modules that empower students with the freedom and flexibility to complete their assignments when and where they choose within each week. Students engage in regular one-on-one interaction with teachers and can contact them during daily office hours for help through live video call, real-time chat messaging, or by phone.

North Carolina Virtual Public School

NCVirtual

> "We're all just passionate about helping all students be successful."
> — Chris Smith, Instructional Designer, NCVPS

Overview

The second largest virtual school in the United States, North Carolina Virtual Public School (NCVPS), is a part of the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction and partners with local schools and districts to meet state education priorities. NCVPS is a supplemental program, offering middle and high-school-level courses to high school and middle school students from public, private, charter, and homeschool settings. As a supplemental program, enrollment in NCVPS is a school/district decision and diplomas are awarded by the school of record. NCVPS offers fall/spring block, year-long, and summer semesters. Learn more about NCVPS via its overview video.

Please Note: There are two virtual charter schools in North Carolina, which should not be confused with NCVPS: The North Carolina Virtual Academy and North Carolina Cyber Academy (formerly named the North Carolina Connections Academy).

School Goals/Mission Statement

The mission of NCVPS is to serve learners with high-quality online courses and expanded options in education. Visit the school's website.

NCVPS's goal is to prepare students to be college- and career-ready. The school's student-centered teaching and course-design model emphasizes:

- Students First: Instruction is individualized for each student.
- Teachers Matter: Technology cannot replace good teachers.

- Communicate Effectively: Stakeholders understand how learning impacts their students at any point in time.

Delivery Model

- Virtual (asynchronous): Students may access online courses in real-time or receive face-to-face instruction, using the same educational system, but not at the same time.
- Blended: Certain courses are offered as [Occupational Course of Study Learning](#) where the district commits a face-to-face teacher to coordinate the course instruction in collaboration with an online teacher.
- Part time: This program serves as a supplement to support students and families who are either registered in the local school district or participate in homeschooling and therefore full time is not an option. (There are a few exceptions where students attend full-time, but they continue to be enrolled in the school of record).

Students

Academic Year 2021–2022:

- Grade Levels: 7–12, with some accelerated 5th and 6th grade students
- 34,224 unique students
- 21% students with disabilities
- NA% free and reduced lunch (not available, since it is a supplemental program)
- NA% second language learners (not available, since it is a supplemental program)

Graduation Rates

Not Applicable: Courses are supplemental and the school does not award diplomas. However, NCVPS reports a 77% pass rate for its courses (Source: [NCVPS Scorecard](#)).

State Test Scores

Since NCVPS is a supplemental program, the school of record is responsible for administration and tracking state assessment information.

Technology

- Learning Management System (LMS): Canvas: Courses can be accessed via a mobile app or desktop application.
- Student Information System (SIS): The school of record oversees the SIS.
- Devices: The school of record provides the devices. Student devices vary based on the student's home district and/or if the student is homeschooled.

Curriculum & Course Offerings

In the 2020–2021 school year, NCVPS offered more than 135 courses. The catalog contains Advanced Placement (AP), arts, Career and Technical Education Courses (CTE), electives, math, science, social studies, English and world languages. Courses count for high school credit. The majority of students are high school students, however younger students may participate based on approval. NCVPS provides these course samples.

In addition to individual students participating in the NCVPS courses, NCVPS makes the course content available to North Carolina districts, which can utilize the entire course or an individual section, and hire their own teachers to administer the course.

In-House Developed Courses

The majority of the courses are designed and written in-house by North Carolina teachers, who are paid for their services. Two to four certified teachers write the content, while an additional two to four certified teachers review the content. The full-time NCVPS curriculum staff provides these teachers with training on creating quality, accessible content. Therefore, the subject matter experts create accessible documents, including writing meaningful alternative text for images.

Over 70 NCVPS courses created by teachers meet the Quality Matters criteria.

Purchased Courses

Some elective courses were recently purchased from eDynamic Learning and Vidcode. Modular Learning Specialists support NCVPS to identify cutting-edge content and platforms. Before purchasing a course, NCVPS ensures the course meets its accessibility requirements however it does not require Quality Matters certification for such courses.

- eDynamics: Elective and certification courses covering fields such as IT, business management, and health sciences. The courses are designed to meet national and industry certification exam standards.
- Vidcode: Computer coding courses. Vidcode notes their courses are aligned to the national computer science standards, Next Generation Science Standards, and ISTE standards for students.

Considerations for Students with Special Needs

Who is responsible for the IEP and 504 plan?

The student's school of record is responsible for IEP and 504 plans. NCVPS staff cannot access the statewide electronic student information system (SIS), but they do receive a file with student data at the beginning of each school year, which is uploaded into the NCVPS SIS. Since this data does not include the IEP, individual teachers reach out to identified contacts at the school of record to request information regarding modifications and accommodations. Next school year, new functionality in the NCVPS SIS will allow for the school of record to select modifications/accommodations from a list of common items. NCVPS teachers are not automatically involved in the IEP or 504 process for their students. According to the interview, instructional designers sometimes request IEPs and 504s to ensure the development of accessible materials. Access the NCVPS IEP/504/ELL Guidelines.

Assistive Technology/Accessible Educational Materials

The school of record is responsible for all AT devices. NCVPS simply provides the course content and teachers, unless the district chooses to implement the course or in partnership with NCVPS.

Special Education Support

Staff:

- Director of Exceptional Children Education
- Instructional designers adapt curricula to meet the needs of students with disabilities and provide them to all educators.
- Technical staff ensure platforms are supported and accessible.

Guides:

- Special Ed/504 Services
- Guidelines for NCVPS Teachers and School-Level eLAs
- NCVPS Co-Teaching Program NCVPS Online Teachers and Classroom F2F Teachers
- Virtual Support Center

Accessibility Statement

"We closely follow Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act to ensure our electronic and information technology is accessible to people with disabilities. If you cannot access any of the material on our website, please contact us. We will work to resolve the issue." Online Accessibility Statement

The accessibility statement also links to all of the accessibility statements of the software/programs used by NCVPS (e.g. Zoom).

The course design meets or exceeds the minimum accessibility requirements for 508 compliance.

- Third party tools assist in assessing accessibility.

- o UDolt: Scans Canvas content to identify potential accessibility issues
        - o Grackle: Scans all Google Docs and Slides
- Course development process addresses accessibility.
    - o Accessible course design considerations are built into the course development process as course developers receive training in accessible course design.
    - o Subject matter experts are required to provide audio, video, and detailed alt text for all instructional images.
    - o When additional modifications/accommodations are required for unique situations, instructional designers adapt the curriculum to meet these needs. These modifications/accommodations then become permanent features in the courses.

Professional Development

- NCVPS provides ongoing support and training for educators in relation to online tools, pedagogy, and effective use of technology for teaching and learning goals. All professional learning courses are free to North Carolina educators. [Professional Learning Course Listings](#)
- All NCVPS teachers must successfully complete a 16-week Teacher In Training (TnT) program, where they go through eight weeks of course work and eight additional weeks of student teaching in a virtual classroom with a veteran NCVPS teacher. The training focuses on course design and delivery.
- NCVPS developed an Accessibility, Exception Children, and ELL Program Resources web page that is available to all NCVPS teachers and staff through the internally created Professional Learning Hub. On the site, tutorial information demonstrates how to use accessibility features on handheld and desktop devices, including Apple devices, Chromebooks, and Windows. Information is also provided on how to use the Grackle web-based tool to scan Google Docs, Sheets, and Slides for accessibility-related issues, and to learn how to correct any identified issues.
- The webpage also includes tutorials on how to use the built-in Accessibility Checker and how to create transcripts using Microsoft Dictate. A second web page in the Hub, titled Just In Time (JIT) Professional Learning Resources,

contains accessibility support for NCVirtual Teachers and staff. Information on the JIT web page provides information on how to create accessible text and tables, along with more information on Grackle and creating transcripts.

Student-Centered Beliefs

NCVPS believes its student-centered, differentiated/individualized instruction model reduces barriers to learning for most students. "NCVPS has a variety of interventions and supports implemented in the courses to enable students with an IEP or 504 plan to experience successful learning. Examples of interventions and supports include: One-on-one access to the teacher, monitoring of individual student progress by each teacher, school district liaisons for students on an IEP or 504 plan, opportunities for differentiated/personalized instruction based on a variety of learning styles, and the Universal Design for Learning Model, and access to tutors through the Peer Tutoring Center" (source: NCVPS Special Ed/504 Services).

Individualized/Personalized Learning for All Students

An individualized learning approach is built into the three pillars described below. Teachers provide enrichment and support to each individual student.

- **Pillar 1: Grading and Feedback**
  Feedback is paramount. Teachers grade each student assignment with "positive, specific, and directive feedback, which offers the student enrichment (if mastery is reached), a real-world connection, and support for any gaps in learning."
- **Pillar 2: Teaching Through Announcements**
  Our teachers strategically use announcements that are crafted to meet the needs of their students.
- **Pillar 3: Communication**
  Our teachers use every interaction with both students and stakeholders to build relationships. This is where we first begin to separate ourselves from other online courses. We want our students to understand that we are invested in them, and that will directly impact student achievement.

NCVPS places a high value on communication and relationship-building between teachers and students. Teachers play an essential role in creating and maintaining positive and productive relationships with students to facilitate learning and growth, identifying student needs and strengths, and providing enrichment activities and/or support for each student.

Course Flexibility & Support

- NCVPS courses use real-time and asynchronous collaboration tools for course design and assessment.
- Students are paired with faculty from around the world: NCVPS has over 700 teachers on its faculty and emphasizes the critical role teachers play in successful individualization of instruction.
- Students and the school receive further support from learning and technical staff: Outreach and Support Coordinators support the students' local schools.
- [NCVPS Occupational Course of Study (OCS) Program](): As noted above, the NCVPS OCS Learning program provides a true co-teaching experience where the school's face-to-face (F2F) teacher drives the instructional decisions while working daily with the NCVPS online teacher. The NCVPS teacher helps the F2F teacher personalize and differentiate the instruction for each student, but the NCVPS teacher does not deliver the instruction in real-time to the students. The F2F teacher is responsible for delivering the instruction to the students and will plan lessons using the online content and supplementary resources, as needed.

Virtual Learning Academy Charter School

> "We hear this regularly from students after they transfer to our school full-time, 'This was the first time I felt like I wasn't stupid.'"
> — Former Director, Full-Time Programs

Overview

Founded in 2007–08, Virtual Learning Academy Charter School (VLACS) is a virtual public charter school in New Hampshire. VLACS offers full-time and part-time online learning options for K–12 students as well as adult ed classes. New Hampshire students attend tuition-free, while out-of-state and international students pay tuition.

Prior to the pandemic, VLACS provided services to students in grades four through twelve and adult education. During the pandemic its charter was expanded and the school now provides full-time and part-time offerings to students in grades kindergarten through twelve. VLACS courses are entirely online with the option to include face-to-face internships and independent learning through its customized learning model.

VLACS is a 501(c)3 nonprofit, state-approved public charter school. The state pays VLACS $6,090 for every New Hampshire student who enrolls full-time, and pays on a per-credit basis for the thousands of others who take select classes. Learn more about VLACS.

School Goals/Mission Statement

"Our mission is to use the latest technology to provide our students with anytime, unlimited access to a rigorous, personalized education that helps students learn today, graduate tomorrow, and prepare for the future." Link to About VLACS webpage.

Delivery Model

Virtual

- Asynchronous: Forms of learning that do not require interaction with others to occur at the same time. For example, interaction and communication may happen through forums, blogs, email, website links, or other contexts where learners may participate within a wider, more flexible range of times when other participants are not actively present in the same moment. National Online Teaching Standards
- VLACS implements a flexible and customizable learning model that provides students the opportunity to learn at a pace and place that meets their learning needs. Students have the agency to determine how they will demonstrate their learning, whether it be through independent study, in collaboration with their peers, alongside a professional in the workplace, travel, or real-world projects. Asynchronous learning also supports individualized student- teacher connections through one-on-one interactions. Certified instructors are available to assist students during drop-in hours, pre-scheduled appointments. If an instructor is not available, students may receive assistance from members of the academic helpdesk team. The academic helpdesk is open 80–100 hours per week. Parents, students, and instructors meet monthly to discuss progress, successes, and challenges.

Students

Academic Year 2020–2021: Grades K–12

- 816 full-time students (110 elementary, 194 middle, 512 high school) in 2021–2022

- 11,131 part-time students in 2021–2022
- 15–20% of the students have 504 or IEP plans

Graduation Rates

Since students graduate on their own time when they have completed the coursework, calculating the exact graduation percentage proves difficult. The five-year graduation rate was 87.69% in 2020–2021. Many students graduate after June 30th and a significant number of students graduate before June. The same year, the school's dropout rate was 1.85%.

State Test Scores

VLACS students typically score at or above the state averages on standardized test scores. For the academic year 2020–2021, the New Hampshire State Assessment VLACS students' average score on English was 543, compared to the state average of 518. In Math, VLACS students' average score was 495, compared to the state average of 510. Total averages were 1,038 and 1,028, respectively.

Technology

- Learning Management System (LMS): Canvas
- School Information System (SIS): Maestro
- Devices: Devices are provided by the student's school of record.

Curriculum & Course Offerings

VLACS offers high school, middle school, and elementary courses. High school courses include advanced college level and AP courses. VLACS also offers adult education classes. All courses are entirely online. Here is a list of VLACS courses. Sample lessons are not available.

In-House Developed Courses

VLACS does not develop any courses in-house.

Purchased Courses

VLACS purchases courses from third parties, including [FlexPoint](#) (formerly Florida Virtual School) and [eDynamic Learning](#) for Career and Technical Education (CTE) and electives. In the interview, it was stated that for the most part, the curricula address the needs of the students, and teachers do not need to make many adjustments for students with disabilities.

- [FlexPoint](#) is accredited through [Cognia](#).
- [eDynamic Learning](#) course tracks are designed to meet national and industry certification exam standards.

Considerations for Students with Special Needs

Who is responsible for the IEP and 504 plan?

As explained in the [VLACS Middle School program](#), the school's online, flexible, competency-based learning model meets the needs and requirements of many students on IEPs/504 plans. Additional support to meet a student's IEP —including any assistive technologies, use of paraprofessionals, or ancillary services such as occupational therapy (OT) — is provided by the student's local school district. VLACS supports 504 plans, and will adapt the recommendations to align with their program as necessary.

The student's local school district is responsible for writing the IEP. During the interview, administrators shared that for full-time, district-based students, the student's VLACS counselor attends IEP meetings upon request. At times, they are asked to complete forms related to the student's progress. If IEP plans are provided, regardless of whether the student attends full-time or part-time, they are manually added to the SIS, which VLACS instructors can then access.

At times, homeschool families may also need an IEP for their students and may not know how to navigate the system when the student does not physically attend school. VLACS works with these families and directs them to contact their local school district for help with this process.

Assistive Technology/Accessible Educational Materials

All devices are provided by the local school district. Accessibility features are available through the LMS. Some additional adaptations are provided by teachers.

Many accommodations are included in the school's virtual model, so instructors and parents are typically able to meet the needs of their students/children without additional accommodations. For example, the virtual setting eliminates the need for physical considerations like preferential seating. VLACS courses are void of firm deadlines, which avoids the need for accommodations around "extended completion time' for assignments and assessments.

Special Education Support

Local school districts are responsible for administering special education services and receive all related funding, therefore, VLACS does not employ a Special Education Director or special education teachers. Counselors and instructors receive ongoing training on basic 504/IEP structure and policy, as well as the American with Disabilities Act. Many accommodations, such as text-to-speech, are built into the LMS, which decreases the need for instructors to retrofit the curriculum. In the event that students with exceptional considerations or accommodations register for VLACS, the student's school district should get involved to help provide support services.

Accessibility Statement

When a charter school student has an IEP, the charter school works closely with the local district to ensure that services are provided regardless of where the student attends class.

Professional Development

VLACS describes professional development for technology, pedagogy, or other teacher development on its website. Most professional development is provided during staff meetings and annual meetings. Since VLACS is not considered responsible for special education support or services, counselors are available to answer questions and provide basic, general information for VLACS teachers.

Student-Centered Beliefs

VLACS believes in a competency-based, customizable, self-paced model for learning. VLACS learning is self-directed and self-motivated, with one-to-one support available when requested. Students can earn badges (micro-credentials), which translate academic work to workplace competencies, facilitating the transition from school to career.

"Customized learning embraces every student's differences, their unique talents, and learning styles. With the flexibility to meet the needs of all students, an eighth-grade student who excels in more rigorous courses can take a course at a higher level, a student with dyslexia can use our built-in readers to learn through listening, or a student with a passion for health science can take career-focused courses in preparation for a future career in the field." Link to VLACS Customized Learning webpage.

VLACS provides a curriculum that is:

- Individualized
- Flexible
- Supportive
- Competency-based
- Remediated
- Customized for individual learners

Course Flexibility & Support

- VLACS courses are entirely online and self-paced.
- Students also have the flexibility to propose independent projects, incorporate internships, travel, work, service learning, and more, as part of their course work.
- Students can submit and re-submit any assignment they need to until they achieve competency. VLACS does not have completion deadlines for demonstrating competency.
- Students have ongoing contact with instructors, including one-on-one virtual conferences, during office hours or by appointment. Students work with their

instructor to determine how they will reach competency, and how they will demonstrate it. The instructor also assesses all of the student's work through a Discussion-Based Assessment (DBA). Students must master the DBA to move on to another competency.

- VLACS provides a school counseling department to support academic scheduling and placement, special education, personal development, and other related topics.
- An academic help desk is available on request.
- Grades: Failure is not an option at VLACS, rather, students must demonstrate competency before moving on their course. When a student does not meet the required 85 percent score, the instructor offers them additional time to practice before assignments are resubmitted.
- A technical help desk is available to address computer trouble, including challenges connecting to coursework or navigating the online platform.