



FACT SHEET

History of Virtual Schools

For the past four decades, long distance learning has been available to students. Initial efforts used the phonograph or radio to deliver instruction, which evolved to television in the 1960s and 1970s. The Internet became the modern carrier of long distance education in the mid-1990s, which gave birth to virtual, on-line schools.

Virtual schools have the same goal as traditional, brick-and-mortar schools: to graduate students. Unlike traditional schools, virtual schools are Internet based and available 24-7. They provide students the flexibility of any time, anywhere access to rigorous, personalized education. In the virtual classroom, every student is in the front row because he or she has one-to-one interaction with the teacher, and is directly accountable for every query, question or exercise. It is important to note that virtual schools are a complement as well as an alternative to traditional schools, not a replacement.

Nationwide 24 states have on-line education programs. In 1997, Florida established the first statewide, Internet-based public high school. Today the Florida Virtual School (FLVS) enrolls more than 60,000 middle and high school students. Regionally, New England lags behind the rest of the country.

A few NH schools currently offer online classes through agreements with out-of-state providers; however, participation is contingent upon funding by the sponsoring school district and/or reciprocal teacher loaning. New Hampshire's Virtual Learning Academy Charter School is the region's first-of-its-kind model. The Academy is available free of charge to any high school student who lives in the state of New Hampshire and does not require local school districts to loan teachers.

It is certain that additional states will join the virtual schooling movement, as the U.S. Department of Education encourages all states to establish and grow virtual schools through its National Educational Technology Plan.

Facts About The Virtual Learning Academy

Legal Name

Virtual Learning Academy Charter School

Established

The New Hampshire Board of Education approved the Virtual Learning Academy Charter School in May 2007.

Administrative Offices

Located at Tuck Learning Campus (former Exeter High School campus) 30 Linden Street, Exeter, NH.

Contact Information

Web site: www.vlacs.org

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Overview

The Virtual Learning Academy Charter School is New Hampshire's first statewide, on-line high school that is available, free of charge, to all high school students who live in New Hampshire. The Exeter Region Cooperative School District (SAU 16) initiated the Academy as an independent organization. The Academy has its own employees, teaching staff, Board of Trustees, and financial statement.

Organizational Vision

To use the latest technologies to provide New Hampshire's high school students any time, any where access to a rigorous, personalized education that helps them learn today, graduate tomorrow and prepare for the future.

In addition, the Academy is also a viable option for high school dropout students who wish to earn a high school diploma while maintaining a job. Through the Academy, students can take the courses they need at times that accommodate their work schedule.

Governance & Administrative Leadership

For the 2007 – 2008 school year, the Academy's administrators are:

Arthur (Skip) Hanson, Ed.D.

Superintendent of Schools, SAU 16*

Steve Kossakoski, Ph.D.

Chief Executive Officer, Virtual Learning Academy

Gary M. Tirone, CAGS

Chief Learning Officer, Virtual Learning Academy

A Board of Trustees will be appointed and will consist of: 2 members of the business community, 2 members who are parents of enrolled students, 2 members who are post-secondary educator(s) or administrator(s), 3 members who are public school educators or administrators, 2 members from any NH school board.

*For the school year 2007 – 2008, the SAU 16 superintendent will assist with the appointment of Trustees and the establishment of policies, budgets, curriculum and additional operational matters. By July 1, 2008, the Academy's CEO will assume the chief leadership role.

Funding

The Virtual Learning Academy receives state-funded tuition through New Hampshire's Education Trust Fund, which exists to benefit New Hampshire public schools. Local schools are funded by the state's Adequacy Education Fund and local property taxes.

The Academy's tuition projections are based upon NH state law RSA 194-B:11. Current estimates calculate the Academy will receive approximately \$3,600 for each full-time student for the 2007 – 2008 school year. The cost for part-time students will be pro-rated based upon the full-time student tuition.

Plans are to supplement the state-funded tuition with federal, state and corporate grants and tuition from out-of-state students, who will be charged 125% of the rate for NH students.

Curriculum

The Academy will offer the required curriculum and courses to graduate high school students, in addition to college-prep, special interest and advanced placement classes. Most course content will be purchased from the Florida Virtual School, an accredited virtual school with a successful track record since 1997. The Academy's educators may design specialty course material, such as lessons in New Hampshire history. The Academy's curriculum will engage students by connecting real world applications to learning through problem solving and/or project-based learning assignments.

Prospective Students

High school students who reside in New Hampshire are eligible to apply, and once accepted may enroll for part-time or full-time (beginning Fall 2008) studies free of charge. Admitted students are expected to be self-motivated, possess good communication and writing skills, able to work independently, have good time management skills and have access to a computer with an Internet connection.

Out-of-state, high school students will be able to apply to the Academy, and once accepted may enroll in classes once New Hampshire students have had time to register.

Admitted students will be assigned a teacher advisor who maintains regular contact with the student and parent.

Teaching Staff

All Academy administrators, teachers and advisors will be NH certified and deemed as highly qualified according to state standards. The Academy's administrators will conduct a specialized, comprehensive hiring process to ensure they are willing to accept the unique and demanding challenges of on-line teaching. The Academy will hire a mentor to provide new teachers professional coaching, support and advice.

2007 – 2008 School Calendar

Registration for the Academy's Winter 2008 Semester begins October 1, 2007. Students can register for one or more classes on a part-time basis. Classes for the Winter 2008 semester begin in January.

Students who intend to graduate from the Academy, can register as a full-time student and take a full course load starting in the Fall 2008 semester, which begins in September. Registration for the Fall 2008 semester starts March 2008.

Accountability & Benchmark Goals

The Academy will use three measures to assess and measure academic achievements for its full-time students.

- (1) The New England Common Assessment (NECAP) will be administered to test reading, mathematics and writing. Tests will be administered as mandated by the New Hampshire Department of Education, and will be given at six sites located throughout the state and proctored by Academy staff members.
- (2) Quizzes and tests administered by the teacher in addition to student projects assigned by the teacher.
- (3) Finally, all full-time students will be required to maintain a digital portfolio of their work that includes reflections about what they have learned and teachers' comments about a student's strengths and weaknesses.

Technology Requirements

All students and teachers are required to have a PC with an Internet connection, a browser plug in, word processing software and web browser. A broadband Internet (DSL, fiber, or cable) connection is recommended, however a 56K modem connection will work for students. Teachers and students communicate through an online course management system that enables both parties to upload and share materials (text, graphics, audio, or video), hold discussions and chats, give quizzes and surveys, and gather and review assignments.