

VIRTUAL LEARNING ACADEMY CHARTER SCHOOL

VLACS ASPIRE

SCHOOL IS WHEREVER LEARNING OCCURS

KEY FEATURES:

- ✓ Complete Redesign
- ✓ Enriched Virtual and Experiential Blended Models
- ✓ Competency-Based Learning
- ✓ Experiential Learning
- ✓ Higher Education Partnerships

AT A GLANCE:

Start Date: Fall 2013

Grades Served: 5-12

Location: New Hampshire

Operator: Virtual Learning Academy Charter School

Setting: Statewide

Students at Start: 1,391

Students at Capacity: 2,058

MODEL TOOLBOX:

Learning Management System & Gradebook: Moodle

Student Information System: GeniusSIS, customized Salesforce modules

Assessment Tools and Approaches: Traditional & competency assessments in traditional courses; Moodle tools, Show Evidence for performance assessments, Adobe Connect for discussion-based assessments

Implementation Partners: Show Evidence (performance assessment platform), Ascendle & Motivis (Salesforce development), Center for Collaborative Education/Quality Performance Assessment (performance assessment development), Educational Policy Improvement Center (development of student advisory competencies)

Digital Content Providers: VLACS design team (performance assessments), FLVS, eDynamic Learning, SAS Curriculum, Discovery Ed, National Repository of Online Courses, Middlebury Interactive Languages

“Rapid technological advances have provided us with the tools that are necessary to offer equitable access to high-quality learning experiences, regardless of zip code, and to break free from the constraints of industrial age schedules and calendars.”

STEVE KOSSAKOSKI, CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER, VLACS

The Vision: Every student should have an education that helps them soar. That is the foundation for the Virtual Learning Academy Charter School’s “Aspire” model. By redesigning its successful virtual school program, VLACS is changing the paradigm of what it means to go to school in the 21st century. Because the policy environment in New Hampshire rewards and encourages competency-based approaches, VLACS Aspire is positioned to provide opportunities for students to move away from “school” being the place for learning to “school” being wherever learning occurs, whether online or in the community.

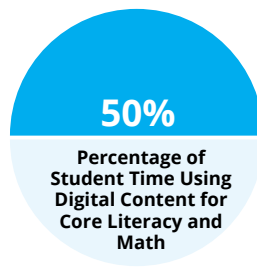
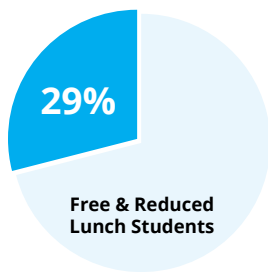
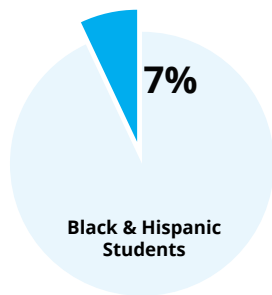
The Academic Model: VLACS Aspire is developing and implementing a 100 percent self-paced, competency-based learning model. Instead of a course-centric curriculum, the curriculum is framed around a map of required competencies. The goal of the school’s redesigned model is to create a nearly limitless number of learning pathways that best meet each student’s needs. With the support of an online instructor, students may master each competency through any number of possible learning opportunities: independent learning, projects, internships, work, online courses, face-to-face courses, hobbies, tutoring services, service learning, or a combination of these activities.

As a result, VLACS Aspire is pushing the definition of blended learning: in addition to traditional class-

room-based learning, learning experiences in real-world, community-based settings serve as the face-to-face component that is integrated with online learning opportunities. This experiential blended model leverages the power of technology to break down the walls and barriers of what we consider school to be. And students become the ones in charge of selecting how to blend different types of learning to best meet their needs.

Deeper thinking is required of students as they demonstrate their mastery of competencies. All VLACS courses utilize “Discussion-Based Assessment” in which instructors assess competency through discussion-through questioning that requires students to demonstrate that they can apply what they learn. Through “Can Do Assessments,” students demonstrate their skills and understanding in response to questions that the teacher designs or that they design themselves, especially for learning through internships and projects. Students have additional opportunities to practice deeper thinking through peer collaboration in distributed learning teams and service-learning.

The Organizational Model: Students can enroll and start learning on any day of the year. In VLACS Aspire’s model, teachers are freed from lesson planning and content delivery, enabling them to serve primarily as learning coach, facilitator, and mentor to students. Teachers provide



BLENDING SUBJECTS:
All

BY THE NUMBERS:

Year 1 public revenue per pupil: \$4,756

Year 1 expenses per pupil: \$4,829

Year 4 revenue per pupil: \$4,528

Year 4 expenses per pupil: \$4,531

Years to sustainability: 1

formative feedback and determine when an intervention—additional on-line resources or a series of lessons designed by the teacher—is needed to help a student achieve mastery. In this model, teachers become expert at building relationships. Most VLACS students attend local schools and enroll in VLACS part-time. The daily schedule varies by student, in part driven by the place-based school and in part by the student's learning pathway. Some students spend time in a blended learning lab, others work in a library to collaborate virtually with their distributed learning team, while others participate in internships in their local community.

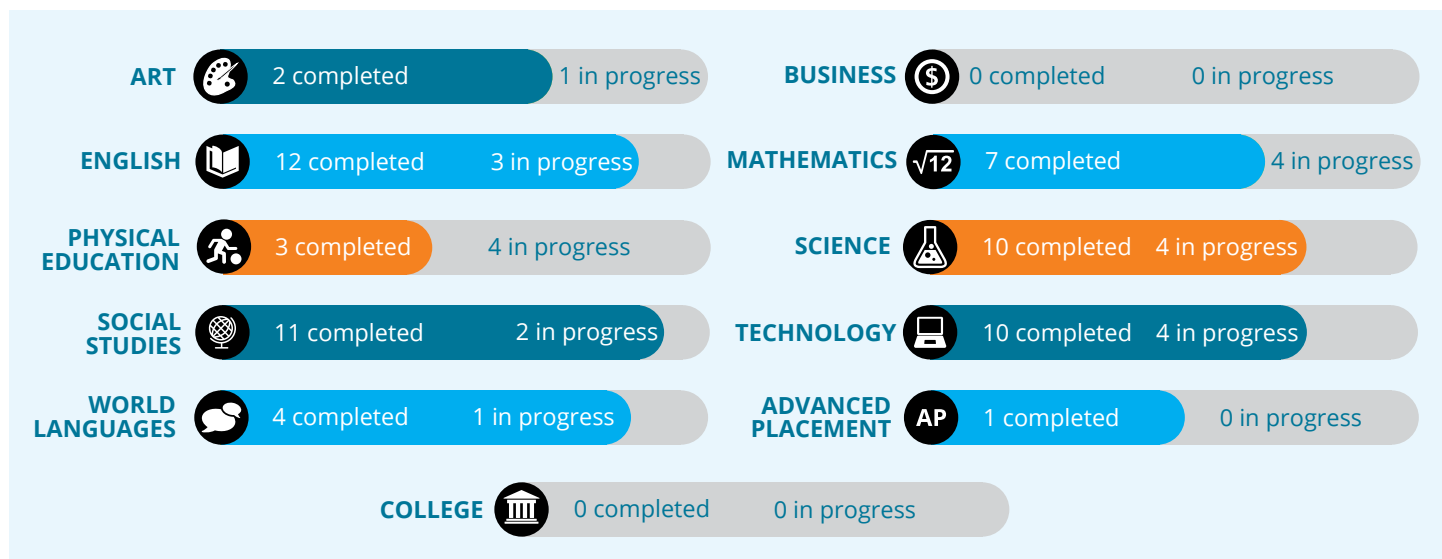
In partnership with higher education institutions—Southern New Hampshire University, an NGLC grant recipient, and the Community College System of New Hampshire—VLACS Aspire offers students the opportunity to earn an Associate's degree or college level certificates through competency-based dual credit courses. SNHU is also an experienced resource as VLACS designs its 100 percent competency-based model and serves as a grade 13/transition year partner.

The VLACS technology infrastructure is cloud-based and designed to scale as the number of students served increases. The organizational

structure is designed to rapidly increase instructional, support, and/or administrative staff if and when it is needed.

The Operator: The Virtual Learning Academy Charter School is a successful statewide online charter school in its sixth year of operation with current course enrollments approaching 20,000. It is projected to have a 70 percent enrollment growth rate over the next five years. The school is not funded based on its student enrollment; instead revenue is earned only when students complete coursework and demonstrate learning.

INTERACTIVE TRANSCRIPT — COMPETENCY MAP



An online interactive transcript keeps track of the learning pathways students take toward mastery of required competencies.

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

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