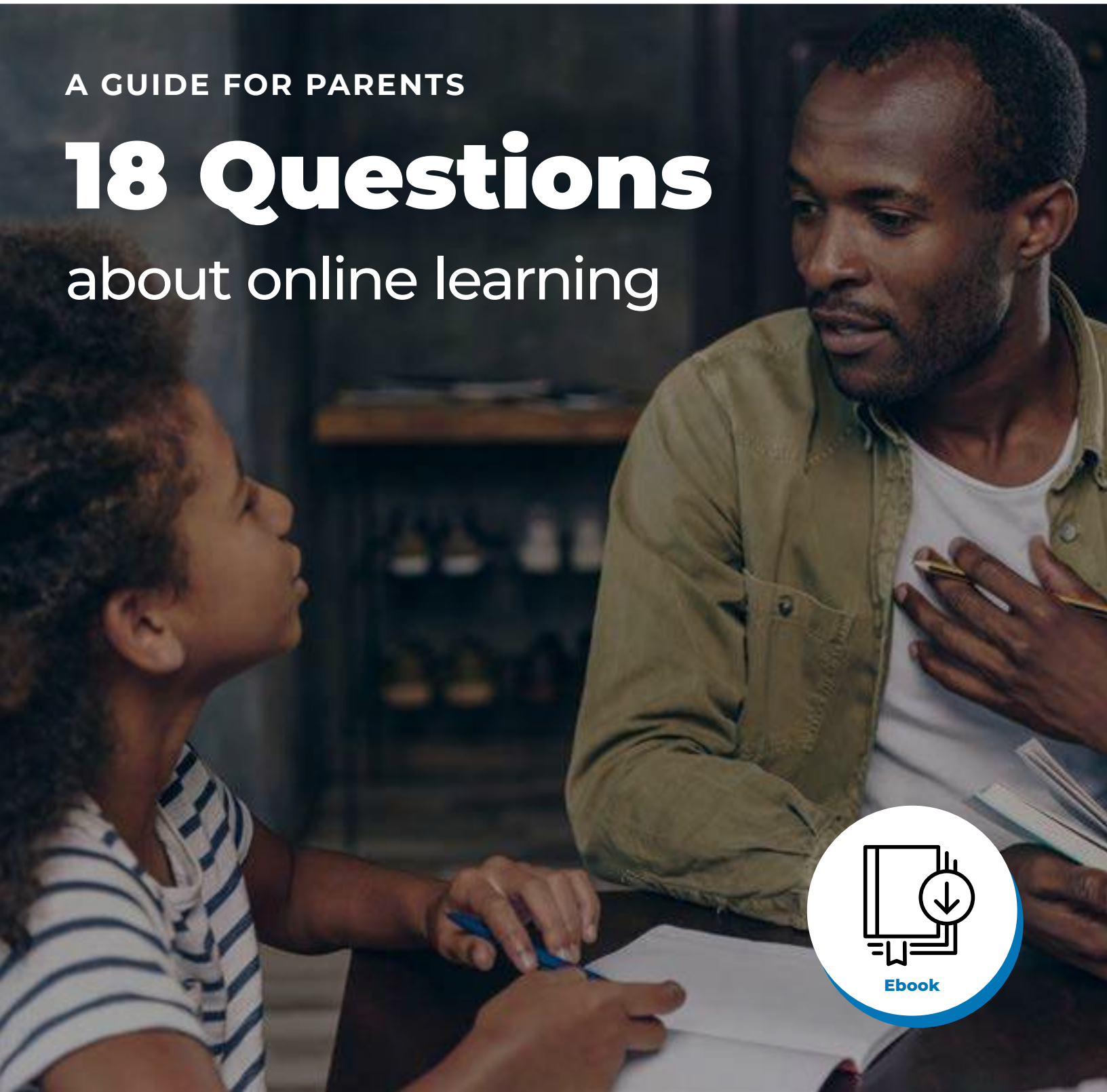
VLACS

A GUIDE FOR PARENTS

18 Questions

about online learning



Ebook

18 Questions Ebook

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Introduction

Thousands of students in grades K-12 today are using online education as a way of getting ahead, staying ahead and graduating on time.

And as such, more and more parents are beginning to see the value in online learning and have begun enrolling their children in both part-time and full time online education programs. But this wonderful new online opportunity comes in all shapes and sizes—so it's important to be as educated as possible before making the leap to online learning.

As the first statewide, online virtual public elementary, middle, and high school in New Hampshire, Virtual Learning Academy Charter School (VLACS) knows a thing or two about what it means to deliver a quality online education. At VLACS, students are provided with a diverse array of learning journeys—each of which is unique in its individual approach but is rooted in fundamental dedication to personalized and student centered learning.

Unlike traditional approaches in online education, this innovative learning strategy allows students to customize their learning experience in a way that best meets their needs, in a setting that engages their interests, talents and passions.

At VLACS, learning happens anytime, anywhere.

The common definition of anytime, anywhere learning is based on the notion that students can learn in school or at home at any time of the day using a digital or online tool. But this sounds like every other online learning program out there doesn't it? With VLACS, there's a difference.

VLACS is redefining the concept of anytime, anywhere learning by allowing students to use the world as their classroom. Through innovative learning journeys described further in this eBook, VLACS has helped students from throughout the country pursue their interests, talents and passions in an

approach never before seen in the learning landscape. When conducting your research for an online school, be sure to ask one or all of the following 19 questions.

Be sure to check out the section below each question entitled “The VLACS Difference” to see just how VLACS is changing what it means to learn and “go to school” in the twenty-first century.

Question 1

How Old Does My Child Have to Be to Attend?

Every online school program is different when it comes to age requirements.

Some programs are available to only high school students, while others allow elementary, middle, and high school students to enroll.

The VLACS Difference

Students who reside in New Hampshire and are less than 21 years of age may apply for full or part-time enrollment at VLACS. But ideally, online learning isn't about age—it's about having the opportunity to fulfill needs, pursue interests, and realize dreams.

Over the years elementary school students have successfully completed VLACS middle school courses and middle school students have earned high school credit. And, we now provide high school students with the opportunity to earn an associate degree. Specific questions about age and our services can be answered by our guidance department.

Question 2

Can My Child Attend Even If We Live Out Of State?

There's a reason one of online education's other monikers is "distance learning."

Compared to the traditional brick and mortar schools, online learning knows no boundaries. Residency requirements may vary by the types of online education programs you're looking at, but for the most part, online learning is for everyone. Many online programs charge tuition, but there are state funded programs that provide free services to residents.

The VLACS Difference

At VLACS, students who live outside of New Hampshire are accepted on a tuition basis. It doesn't matter if you live in New York, Texas, Rhode Island or even nearby Maine or Massachusetts. Students who reside in New Hampshire are eligible to attend VLACS free of charge.

Question 3

May My Child Continue To Attend Traditional School?

Yes. Many students attend online schools on a part-time basis.

They continue to participate in school athletics, they still have an opportunity to serve on student council and they still get to attend school-sponsored events. In fact, in most instances, traditional schools partner with online learning programs in an effort to offer courses otherwise unavailable, and provide opportunities for students to recover course credits.

Many high school students are also unable to take Advanced Placement or specialized classes because their school district cannot afford the course or there is not enough student interest for a school district to justify funding one.

Online learning makes it possible for students to take a wide variety of AP and college-level courses even if their school cannot offer these courses.

However, not every online school has the authority to “grant” course credits and most local public schools have policies and procedures regarding the transfer of credit.

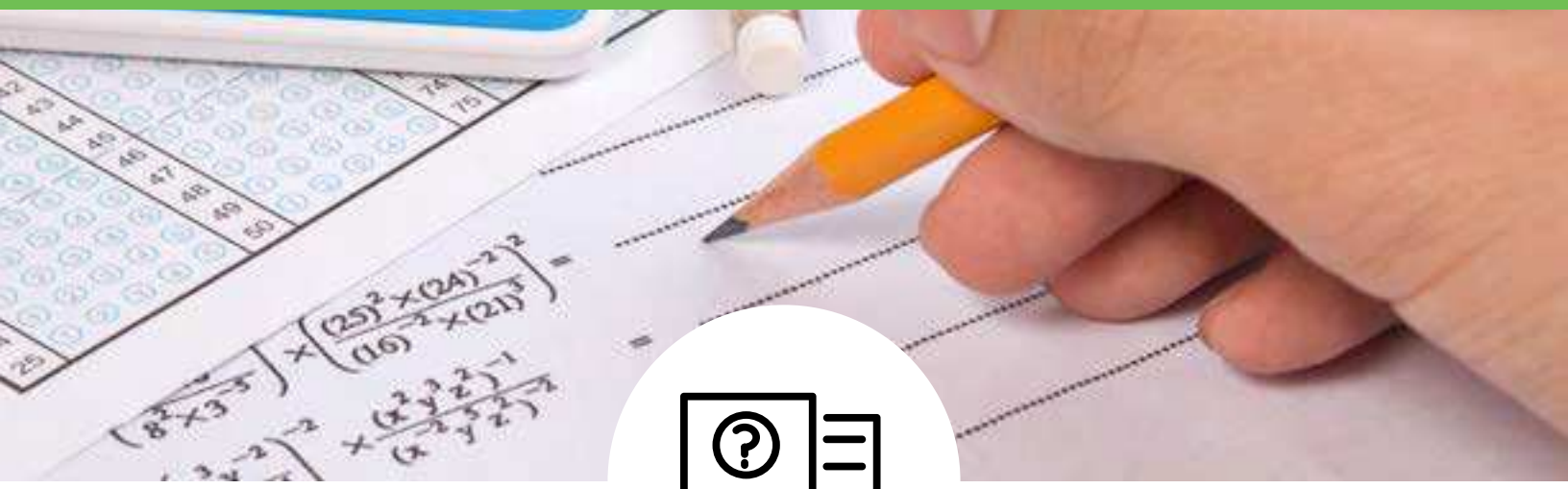
Before enrolling in an online program it’s a good idea to contact your local school’s guidance department to find out if they will accept credits from the online school your child is interested in attending.

The VLACS Difference

Our student body is made up of both part-time and full-time students. Part-time students are typically enrolled in another school, home educated or are enrolled in another educational program.

QUESTION 3

In fact, 72% of our student body attend public school on a full-time basis. We are an approved charter school AND public school in New Hampshire and as such we are authorized to grant course credit and to award diplomas. Typically, schools will accept our course credits, but we recommend that you contact your school's guidance department for information about enrollment or course restrictions before enrolling.



Question 4

What Is The Typical Timetable For A Course?

Many online schools follow a traditional calendar and operate on a traditional schedule often expecting students to complete work according to a predetermined schedule.

But not all of them do this.

The VLACS Difference

Learning is not restricted by time. Instead, expectations in terms of schedule for the many learning journeys at VLACS are personalized—meaning students learn at their own pace, on their own time, when they're ready to learn.

This doesn't mean students are simply left on their own. Students are expected to regularly submit work and communicate with instructors in accordance with a personalized pace chart. The timeline for course completion is generally flexible to meet the needs of students, not a calendar.

The following are time-lines associated with each learning journey:

COURSE

The timeline for course completion is flexible to meet the needs of students. Typically, students will complete a 1-credit course in about 38 weeks or complete a 0.5-credit course in 19 weeks. Students could opt to accelerate the pace of these courses or request additional time if they find the coursework too challenging.

QUESTION 4

PROJECTS

Each project lasts approximately 3–4 weeks and equals one competency.

EXPERIENCES

This depends on the experience that you design and the amount of time you have to commit to your experience. It may take about four weeks to complete an experience that satisfies a single competency or 32-36 weeks to master the competencies for a full-credit.

TEAMS

Team courses typically run 17–18 weeks, start on a specific date and have periodic due dates throughout the course.

COLLEGE

The traditional pacing for these courses is 16-18 weeks. However, you may complete the courses over a longer period of time, if needed, or you may opt to complete courses on an accelerated pace. A student who takes an eStart course through VLACS is however expected to follow a traditional college calendar.

Students at VLACS also have the option to mix and match their learning journeys in order to master competencies. The length of time it takes to master a competency when mixing and matching varies.

Question 5

What Does A Typical School Day Look Like?

Unlike traditional school, where a student is expected to be at their desk at 7:30 a.m. sharp until they are dismissed at 2:30 p.m., a student enrolled in an online learning program full or part time can complete coursework at any hour of the day or night.

The VLACS Difference

Students have the freedom to complete the work at their own pace—meaning that a student may complete one competency in couple of weeks but require additional time to master the next competency.

It all depends upon the pathway a student chooses to follow; whether it is through courses, teams, experiences, projects or college. There are really a limitless number of schedules a student can follow ultimately, at the end of the day, it's up to the student to determine when, where and at what time they want to learn. Many VLACS students integrate learning with working a part-time or full-time job, or pursue passions related to athletics, dance, music, art, etc.

Question 6

What Skills/Strategies Will Help My Child Be A Successful Online Learner?

There is no typical online learner—just as there are no typical students in traditional brick and mortar schools.

Since there are many different online learning models, it's a good idea to find out how your child will be supported once enrolled. For example, an advanced student may want to move quickly through a course or a struggling student may require additional time. If the online school requires all students to start and end courses at the same time then the learning model may not meet the needs of these particular students.

Typically, online schools report that successful students are organized, manage their time well, and have good communication skills. Of course, these students will be successful in most any school, whether online or face-to-face.

Many adolescents are in the beginning stages of building these skills and need a learning environment that supports their growth.

The VLACS Difference

We believe that the best way to ensure student success is to develop strong relationships between students, instructors, and parents in addition to giving students the opportunity to customize their learning.

VLACS instructors work with students and parents to design a learning plan that best meets the

student's needs. We have found that many students develop independent learning skills because it's part of the learning process at VLACS. So, what skills and strategies will help a student succeed at VLACS?

It's quite simple, actually:

Successful students are those who are willing to work and to learn from their mistakes.

Question 7

What Is Customized Learning And How Does It Work In A Virtual School Environment?

Customized learning is about flexibility, personalization, and a commitment to supporting students. Some virtual schools attempt to emulate a student centered or personalized learning models, but rarely, if ever, create a customized learning environment that shifts the focus from the teacher and school to the student.

The VLACS Difference

Customized learning allows students to make decisions about when, where, and how they learn.

When students take ownership of their learning they control its direction, become engaged and excited about learning and are more likely to enjoy the deep thinking and hard work that follows. At VLACS, we believe that customization is the key to taking ownership of learning.

As a virtual public elementary, middle, and high school, VLACS puts its students in the driver's seat of their own education—allowing them to steer their learning experience in ways that work for them.

This is achieved by following the four core principles of customized learning. They include:

1. WHEN LEARNING TAKES PLACE

A customized approach to learning allows students to make choices about "when" they want to learn by providing students with the flexibility to learn at a time and pace that meets their needs . At VLACS, students may decide that mornings are the best time to learn math or that evenings are the perfect

time to learn a language. Students also have the flexibility to create a schedule that gives them time to participate in an internship at a local business on Monday and focus on academics on Tuesday.

Students are in charge of designing their own customized learning plan.

2. WHERE LEARNING TAKES PLACE

The majority of our part-time students attend traditional schools and receive a high quality education. However, the traditional concept of learning taking place solely in traditional school settings is changing rapidly. Advances in technology now place a wealth of resources at the fingertips of students. We have leveraged the power of technology to allow students to learn from any location, whether it be in a "brick and mortar" school or in their home. We also believe that a great deal of engaging, exciting, and rigorous learning takes place in real world settings. Through our Experiences pathway students can master academic competencies at a business, museum, or in most any location.

Students may master competencies through courses, internships, teams, independent study, community service, projects or college courses.

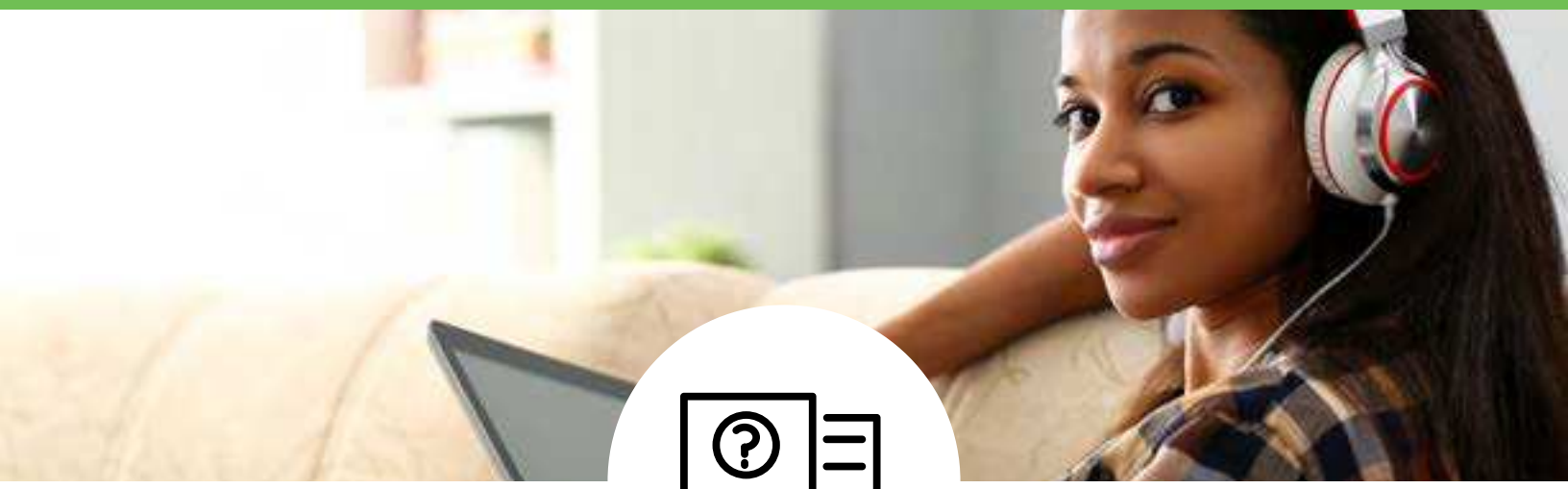
3. HOW LEARNING TAKES PLACE

It's our belief that students should have the opportunity to choose the learning environment that is most likely to help them master academic competencies. A student can decide that the best way to learn math is through a traditional high school or college but choose to master English competencies by interning at a marketing firm or by helping a local museum create a new exhibit about their town's history. Our three learning journeys— courses, projects, and experiences — provide students with an almost unlimited number of learning opportunities.

Students at VLACS can opt to learn at workplaces, museums, in nature, at the theater, or wherever their interests, talents, and passions take them. At VLACS, the world is your classroom.

4. TIME IS ON YOUR SIDE

Traditional educational models are built on the premise that all students learn at the same rate; however, in reality a student may quickly master concepts in history but require additional time to complete a competency in chemistry. At VLACS, students do not "time out" of the opportunity to learn. If a student wants to accelerate, that's wonderful, and if a student needs additional time to understand a complex theory we provide the support and flexibility necessary for the student to succeed.



Question 8

How Much Does It Cost?

There is a significant difference between well designed and professionally staffed virtual schools and lower cost course providers where little if any student teacher interaction is provided.

You can expect most schools that have the approval of a state authority or accrediting agency to charge between $450 and $600 per half-credit. Full-time student tuition also varies greatly depending on the services available to students. Tuition costs for full-time programs range from about $6,000 to $9,000.

The VLACS Difference

Students who reside in New Hampshire, are under twenty-one years of age, and have not earned a diploma, attend free of charge. VLACS also welcomes out-of-state students on a tuition basis.

Students who decide to enroll in college courses earn high school credit and `college credit. In order to qualify to receive college credit, all students are required to pay a $100-$150 administration fee per course to the college to cover administrative fees.

Students who live outside of New Hampshire are welcome to attend VLACS on a tuition basis. The following tuition rates apply:

Out-of-state tuition

2019-2020 full-time and part-time tuition:	$499 per half-credit
Applications fees:	$20

Question 9

What Is The Admissions/Enrollment Process Like?

At most online schools, students can enroll anytime—on demand. And in many cases, enrollment is as simple as clicking a few buttons on a website.

The enrollment process at virtual schools will likely differ depending on whether your child is attending full or part-time, so be sure to check whether or not there are certain admissions requirements for your student. If you're planning on sending your student full-time, expect a more in-depth enrollment and admission process. If your child will be enrolling as a part-time student, the enrollment process typically involves registering for courses and communicating with the assigned instructor. Most online schools follow a traditional academic calendar where courses begin in September and end in June.

There are a few schools, however, that allow for rolling enrollment and students can begin taking online classes at any point in the year. Be sure to check with the school you are interested in attending.

The VLACS Difference

Enrollment in one or more courses, projects, or experiences as a part-time student is a simple process.

First, a student creates an account and selects a learning path.

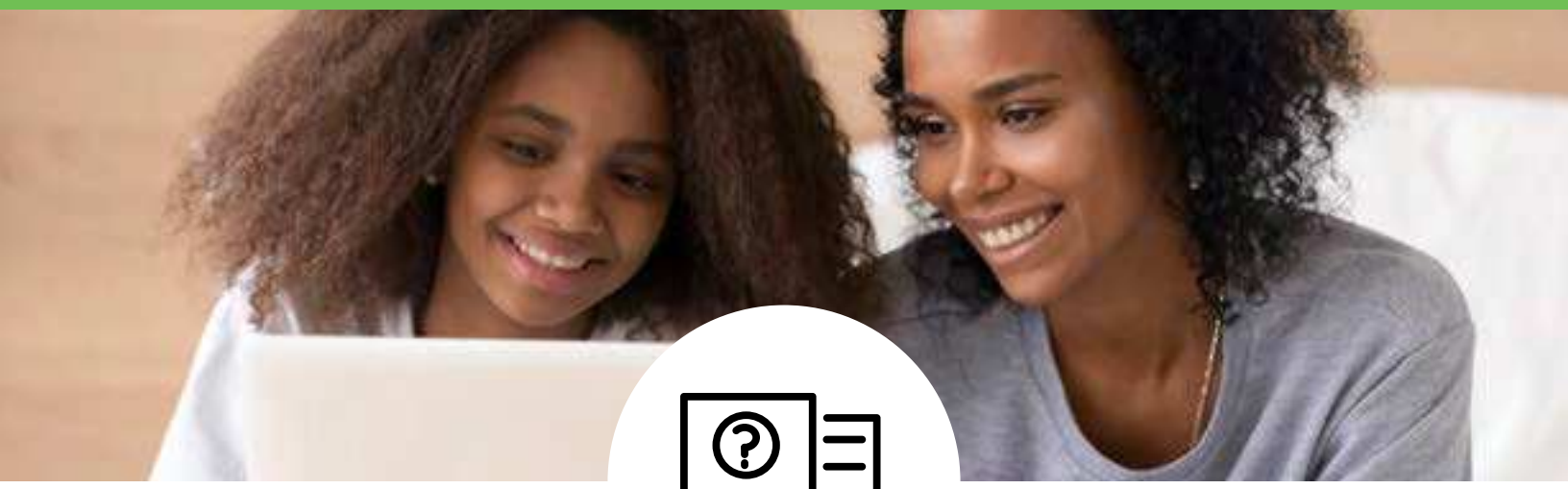
Next, a parent/guardian signs off on the request, and, finally, the student, parent/guardian and instructor schedule a welcome call at which time the student will be activated as a part-time student.

Students who wish to become admitted as full-time students at VLACS must participate in a different process. A prospective full-time student is expected to complete an application, submit school

transcripts, and participate in planning meeting with a member of the school's admissions team.

The full time admissions process involves the following steps:

1. Complete the Application.
2. Attend an Information Session.
3. Complete the Admissions Plan Supplement.
4. Participate in an Admission Plan Review Meeting.
5. Meet Admission Plan goals—which involve completion of online coursework including one or more core academic courses.
6. Admitted as a full time VLACS student. Students are not considered full-time students until a letter of acceptance has been received from VLACS and admissions materials are returned and processed.



Question 10

Does My Child Actually Earn Credit?

There are many virtual schools that are approved to award diplomas, but very few virtual schools are approved to award both diplomas and credit.

Few virtual schools award course credit to part-time students.

Some virtual schools award certificates of completion, not credits, while schools that are approved by a state board of education may award official academic credit. It's best to check with your local school if you intend to transfer credit from a virtual school. In many states local schools are not required to accept transfer credit from any school be it traditional or online. Your local school's guidance counselor should be able to answer questions about transfer credits.

While online schools are not necessarily structured the same as a brick and mortar school, the credits earned from online schools have helped thousands of students earn their high school diplomas.

Some virtual schools serve full-time students and award diplomas.

Some virtual schools have been approved by a state board of education or an independent accrediting agency to award high school diplomas. In most cases diplomas from such schools carry the same "weight" as a traditional diploma when applying to post-secondary programs, colleges, or universities. However, it's worth reviewing a list of colleges where students have been accepted. You may also want to check with the school's website or the state department of education's website to see how the school has fared on state assessments.

The VLACS Difference

PART-TIME STUDENTS AT VLACS

VLACS is approved by the New Hampshire Board of Education and credits earned at VLACS are the same as any credits earned at any public school in the state.

FULL-TIME STUDENTS AT VLACS

VLACS has been approved by the New Hampshire State Board of Education to award credits and high school diplomas. Our graduates have been accepted by some of the most competitive and prestigious universities in the country and our test scores either match or exceed New Hampshire state averages. More information can be found by reviewing our school profile.

THE LIST OF OUR APPROVALS AND AWARDS INCLUDE:

Approvals/Accreditation

- New Hampshire Board of Education – The Board sets standards and approves all public schools in New Hampshire.
- National Collegiate Athletic Association – The NCAA approves certain courses for prospective student-athletes seeking NCAA initial-eligibility. A list of VLACS approved classed can be found at: https://web1.ncaa.org/hsportal/exec/hsAction
- Advanced Placement – All VLACS Advanced Placement courses are audited by the College Board on an annual basis.

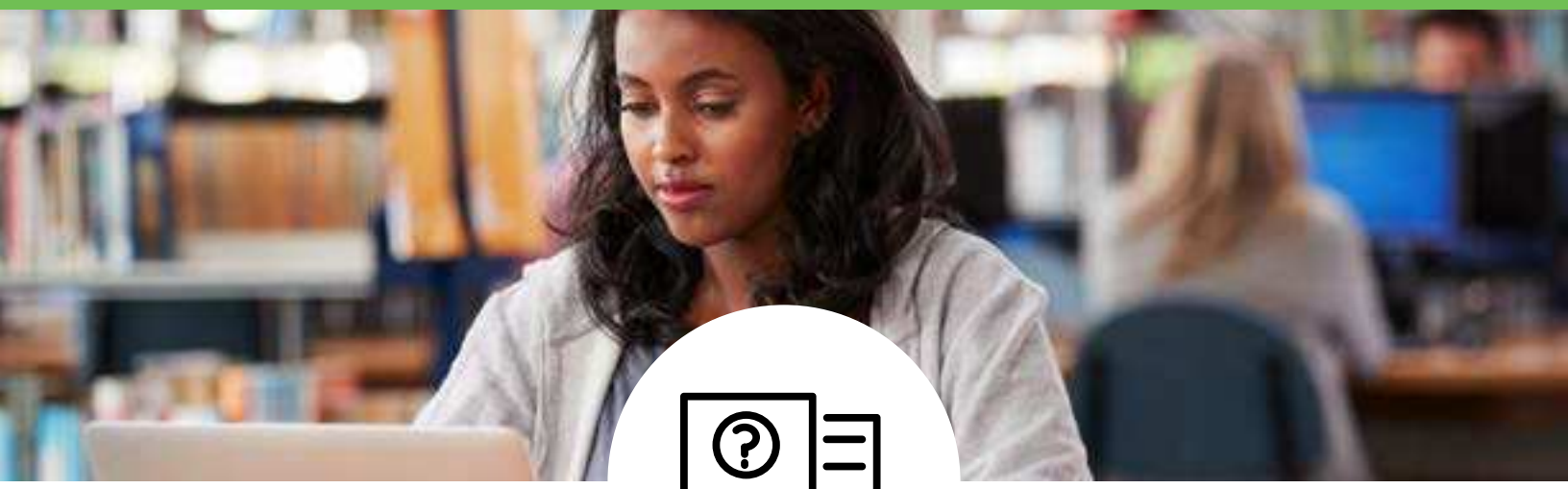
Awards/Recognition

- New England Conference on Gifted & Talented Award, 2009
- NH Excellence in Education Special Recognition Award, 2009 and 2016
- Commissioner's Circle of Excellence Recipient, 2012

OUT-OF-STATE STUDENTS

Students are typically able to transfer credits earned at VLACS to out-of-state schools, but schools in any state retain the right to make final decisions regarding the transfer of credit. In most, if not all cases, schools in any state will accept credits from approved chartered and public schools. It's always best to check with your local school before starting any course.

Students who live outside of New Hampshire will receive a VLACS diploma authorized by the New Hampshire State Board of Education.



Question 11

Are Online Schools Legitimate?

30 states plus Washington DC have fully online schools operating statewide in school year 2014-15.

-Keeping Pace with K-12 Digital Learning

Virtual schools must adhere to certain standards determined by the state and federal government and, in many cases, these standards mirror the those that apply to traditional schools.

Not only are online education credits accepted at most colleges and universities, but in some cases these same institutions are partnering with online schools to offer dual-enrollment opportunities. Many core courses in virtual schools are approved by the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) as meeting eligibility requirements for athletes who hope to participate in college athletics upon graduation from high school.

If you're still not convinced, be sure to ask the following questions of your online school:

- Is the school approved by a state education agency or other accrediting agency?
- Is the school approved by the NCAA?
- Is the school a non-profit business recognized by the IRS and Better Business Bureau?
- Does the school's course selection align with your state's academic content standards?

The VLACS Difference

Our programs have been approved by the State of New Hampshire's Board of Education.

QUESTION 11

All VLACS curriculum is aligned to Common Core State Standards (CCSS) and New Hampshire grade level and grade span expectations (GLE's and GSE's).

It is also recognized as a New Hampshire Scholars High School, and the NCAA has approved all VLACS core courses for establishing eligibility of student athletes. VLACS learning journeys are not leveled and all learning experiences are designed to prepare students for college readiness.

VLACS currently offers honors courses, which challenge students beyond the standard college prep course work. Other opportunities for advanced learning include Advanced Placement (AP), college courses, and the option to earn an associate degree while in high school.

VLACS graduates have even been admitted to over 60 colleges, including:

BOSTON UNIVERSITY
SAINT ANSELM COLLEGE
Keene STATE COLLEGE
Dartmouth
HARVARD UNIVERSITY
PEPPERDINE UNIVERSITY
University of New Hampshire
ITHACA COLLEGE

Question 12

Who Teaches Classes?

At many online schools instructors are certified (or in the process of becoming certified) and may teach at traditional schools, as well.

Training for virtual schools instructors varies from school-to-school. Training may include a brief online tutorial or it might include weeks of online and/or face-to-face instruction. Training requirements also vary by school, so be sure to inquire about how certification requirements and how instructors are trained to work in a virtual school setting.

The VLACS Difference

All our instructors are either New Hampshire certified and deemed as highly qualified according to state standards.

A small percentage of VLACS instructors are provisionally certified while completing an alternative certification program which is mandated by the NH Department of Education.

VLACS hires instructors who have prior experience teaching in traditional classrooms.

New instructors participate in a rigorous sixteen-week training program under the guidance of mentors and school administrators. VLACS recruits instructors who put students first and who enjoy working with adolescents and parents to achieve academic goals. Currently, VLACS employs over 180 instructors who reside in thirteen states. VLACS instructors are more than just teachers who distribute assignments and issue grades.

Instructors at VLACS are required to actively engage with students. They are expected to

QUESTION 12

develop well balanced student/teacher relationships that focuses on individual progress and achieving goals. VLACS instructors maintain frequent, one-on-one communication with each student and their parents or guardians.

Instructors build relationships with student's and parents in order to create a learning environment where students will succeed.

Students enrolled in our elementary program will be assigned the same instructor for all of their core courses, (Math, Language Arts, Science, and Social Studies). This ensures that your child will be able to form lasting relationships with their instructor just as they would in an elementary classroom setting. Additional instructors will be assigned to students enrolled in specials, such as Art and Spanish.

Question 13

What is the Parent's Role in Online Education?

There is no defined role for parents in online education. It all depends upon the type of program in which you choose to enroll your child.

Online learning programs provide many avenues for involvement but don't necessarily require parent participation. Not all virtual schools are the same, so be sure to select a program that meets your expectations in terms of communication and collaboration.

The VLACS Difference

Parents are encouraged to become involved in their child's academic career. All full-time VLACS students are assigned to an advisor whose primary goal is to help every student become future plan ready.

During a student's tenure at VLACS, the advisor serves as a student's advocate, coach, and counselor and the primary contact for parents or guardians.

Advisors build positive relationships with students and parents, or guardians, and guide students through the development of a future plan. This process provides students with opportunities to identify and explore interests, which leads to the creation of short term goals and ultimately results in the development of a post-secondary plan.

Both full time and part time students interact with their instructor on a regular basis. At the beginning of every course, both students and parents participate in a 30-minute welcome call with the instructor.

Parents are expected to take part in monthly communication with the instructor of each course, and

receive monthly progress reports. This means that parents/guardians of a student enrolled in five courses are expected to participate in five monthly calls with instructors.

While this may sound like a lot, the monthly check-ins are invaluable when it comes to providing support to students. When parents/guardians are involved in their child's education, the chances of success are quite high.

If a parent requires additional information they are able to log in to the VLACS portal at any time of day or night.

Question 14

What Types Of Courses Or Learning Opportunities Are Available?

Students have a multitude of topics to choose from when enrolling in an online learning program — some of which aren't usually offered in a traditional school setting.

Many K–12 online schools offer basic middle school and high school courses; however, some online schools offer structured summer school for students needing to just complete a few fundamentals in a course.

Additionally, there are many Advanced Placement (AP) courses available in online schools, as well as dual credit course opportunities that offer high school, college and early college course credit simultaneously.

The VLACS Difference

VLACS is unlike any other online schooling experience out there when it comes to the breath and type of course selection available to its students.

As mentioned earlier in this ebook, VLACS students have the ability to get creative with course selection thanks to the various flexible learning journeys included within the curriculum.

Learning journeys differ in presentation and appearance, but are all designed to help students achieve their academic goals. For instance:

COURSES

At VLACS, students have more than 150 courses to choose from—including basic elementary, middle, and high school courses.

QUESTION 14

These online courses, which include everything from Art History to Intro to Coaching to Creative Writing, are competency based—meaning a student is allowed to work until they have mastered a particular area of a subject.

PROJECTS

This approach allows students to demonstrate mastery of a competency by solving real-world problems through in-depth research and application.

This journey involves students taking part in short, three to four week projects where they must demonstrate mastery of a competency by assuming the role of people in a trade or profession and solving real world problems that people in these jobs face each day.

First, students are guided through independent research to develop an understanding of an academic competency. Next, students apply what they have learned to a real world problem and produce solutions that demonstrate their mastery of the academic competency.

EXPERIENCES

Students have the opportunity to learn through experiences that may include internships, travel, work, independent learning, entrepreneurship, service learning and much more.

This learning journey involves a design phase in which students refine their ideas and connect their activities to academic competencies; a Learn phase in which the student is involved in an internship, travel, or other independent study and is expected to document what they've learned over the course of the experience; and an Assess phase in which students must demonstrate what they've learned and participate in a discussion-based assessment with a VLACS instructor.

In addition to the various learning journeys, VLACS also offers students an opportunity for competency recovery and access to many Advanced Placement (AP) courses.

Question 15

Will My Child Still Have The Opportunity to Engage In Activities That Foster The Development of Social Skills?

Opportunities for socialization vary widely from program to program.

Some online learning programs go above and beyond when it comes to cultivating a learning system that enables students to communicate with each other. In some online learning programs, students have plenty of opportunity to communicate with other students, through online discussion and online collaborative assignments. Using the expanse of the Internet, a student can upload and share materials, hold online discussions and chats, and review assignments.

For students in other online schools, communication between their instructors could be limited. Instructors who teach in a virtual environment may also teach at other institutions, restricting their availability for students. Additionally, lack of communication tools like video could mean that students solely interact with their instructors through email or chat, without any face-to-face communication.

Peer-to-peer communication at other online schools could also be finite if the school does not foster collaboration between students.

The VLACS Difference

A common misconception about virtual school education is that students are left with no opportunity to socialize and are instead left to work on their own in front of a computer.

At VLACS, we believe in providing students with an outlet to be creative and interact with other

students—something we think can make the difference between a mediocre school experience and a truly engaging school experience.

But how exactly does a virtual school like VLACS allow for social interaction if students are geographically distant from one another?

The ideas of meeting after class or meeting at lunchtime don't necessarily apply to virtual school students. Here are a few examples of how VLACS allows its students the opportunity to socialize:

COLLABORATIVE SESSIONS

All courses at VLACS include the opportunity to participate in collaborative sessions. Students can choose from a number of online interactive sessions where they will meet their peers and work through a common learning activity in an online classroom. VLACS online classrooms are equipped the options to communicate via text, voice, or video.

CAREER CONNECTIONS

Any student enrolled in a VLACS course has the advantage of meeting real career experts from a myriad of industries through our Nepris portal we call Career Connections. These live virtual meetings enable students to communicate one-on-one with professionals who work in careers that the student is exploring. Career Connections are designed to provide every student with an opportunity to network with professionals, learn more about their career options, and collaborate with other students.

COMMUNITY SERVICE

Volunteerism allows a student the opportunity to meet and socialize with people in the community they might not otherwise ever get the chance to know. At VLACS, volunteering isn't just encouraged, it's required. All full-time students at VLACS must complete a minimum of 10 hours of community service for each year of enrollment.

Volunteer opportunities, which are required to earn a diploma, are completed through VLACS' advisory program, which is also where a student is able to find job shadow opportunities, as well as explore career and college options, start goal setting, etc.

Past VLACS volunteer projects have included:

- Volunteering at an animal shelter
- Helping disabled neighbors with household chores
- Volunteering within 4-H
- Helping wheelchair bound students discover their abilities
- Raising money through bake sales for the Make-a-Wish Foundation
- Raising money for Children's Research Hospital through video gaming
- Volunteering with adaptive ski programs
- Performing dance routines
- Organizing concerts and theatre productions for sick children and nursing home residents
- Donating to Toys for Tots
- Tutoring struggling students
- Doing chores for churches
- Performing church missionary work

- Volunteering at soup kitchens and homeless shelters
- Traveling to do mission work
- Spending a vacation week volunteering at an orphanage in Haiti
- Teaching religious education to kindergartners
- Spending time with the elderly
- Reading to children at their local libraries
- Coaching younger kids on sports teams and at sports camps
- Helping in the art room at the local elementary school

LEARNING JOURNEYS

Opportunities for socialization can also be found within individual courses included in the VLACS course catalog.

For example, the VLACS' American Government course includes a requirement that the student "experience the responsibilities of citizens by conducting a service project in a community." This allows a student the opportunity to step away from their digital learning environment and socialize with others.

Students in Middle School level courses are also able to socialize with others in the form of giving back. The Middle School Civics course has a community service component in which virtual school students plan and carry out a Service Learning Project.

Socialization is also possible in the Experience Learning Journey that takes the student's learning outside of their online coursework. Experiences are designed by students, which means each student is required to seek out a hands-on activity or work-based learning opportunity that will cover their academic competencies. While students complete their experience, they will also meet with their instructors weekly to discuss the relevance of their learning to their coursework, review their progress, and ask questions as needed.

To discover an eligible experience, a student may find themselves reaching out to local businesses asking if they can participate in an apprenticeship at their workplace. Or, they may form a team with their peers to compete in a competition as their experience. Every experience is an opportunity for a student to gain real-world learning that encourages them to communicate with employees of a company, customers of a business, or fellow students participating in the same experience. It allows students to seize valuable opportunities for personal and professional growth as they begin to prepare for life after graduation.

To empower students to partake in an experience, VLACS launched a badging program that rewards a student any time they gain career-ready skills such as communication and teamwork. When a student completes an experience, for example, VLACS will issue them a digital badge that verifies their accomplishments and celebrates their achievements. Badges are a digital trophy that students can carry with them wherever their journey takes them after high school. Students can add their badges to their email signature, share them on social media, or present them to college admissions officers or prospective employees.

Question 16

How Is My Child Graded /Assessed?

Again, this varies widely from program to program. In some programs, students are graded and assessed similarly to how they would be in a traditional school setting.

Some online schools require a student to earn a minimum grade and then move on. Some follow a competency-based method of grading and assessing a student.

The VLACS Difference

At VLACS, online learning involves an assessment focused around competency based education—which, as mentioned earlier involves a student demonstrating a mastery of academic content, regardless of time, place or pace of learning.

For students taking VLACS courses, competency is measured by a student passing specified competency assignments, including project, papers, exams, or quizzes, with a grade of 85 or better and having greater than a 60% average in the course.

Failure is not an option at VLACS as students are provided with support and as much time as they need to demonstrate their understanding of the course competencies.

The following are just some of the ways VLACS instructors evaluate a student's progress and assess learning:

- Self-checks
- Practice lessons

QUESTION 16

- Multiple-choice questions
- Writing assignments
- Peer review
- Projects
- Research papers
- Essays
- Oral assessments
- Exams
- Discussions
- Real world learning
- Collaborative learning
- Courses

Assessment of student work in Projects, Teams, or Experiences is rated as either approaching competency, met competency, or exceeds competency. Both ratings and traditional grades appear on student transcripts.

Question 17

Can My Child Still Attend If They've Been Diagnosed With A Learning Disability And Require An Individualized Education Plan?

Absolutely! In most cases, online learning can be beneficial to a student who struggles academically due to a learning disability.

And in many cases the online learning environment may already meet many of the accommodations found in a typical individualized education plan. Ultimately, aparent or student should research the online model before enrolling as some will not be appropriate for their given needs.

The VLACS Difference

At VLACS, we comply with New Hampshire and Federal law when it comes to the rights special education students. Our policy reads as such:

"It is the policy of the Virtual Learning Academy Charter School (VLACS) that no otherwise qualified person shall, solely by reason of his/her handicap/disability, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity sponsored by VLACS"

At VLACS, students work at a pace that meets their needs and have the opportunity to redo assignments, tests, and projects as they work toward the mastery of competencies under the guidance of a certified instructor. In many cases our learning model meets many of the requirements in IEPs.

When additional supports are required, as per the IEP, our staff works with the student's school district to create a positive learning experience.

Question 18

How Many Students Are Typically Assigned To Each Full-time Instructor?

The number of students assigned to online instructors varies greatly.

Some virtual school course instructors have very high students loads that far exceed that of traditional school settings (sometimes as many as 300-400 students per instructor) while other schools may have student caseloads that are similar to traditional school settings.

It's worth your time to ask what the student caseload is per instructor before enrolling in a course.

The VLACS Difference

At VLACS, full time instructors have a student caseload that is similar to that of traditional teachers. In the case of a high school instructor this means that an instructor is assigned between 114-140 students.

Adjunct instructors at VLACS have proportionally fewer students. For instance, instructors who are considered "half-time" would be assigned about 65 students. We commit to assigning fewer students to our instructors because we believe that instructors need time to get to know their students and to provide one-on-one support in order to help every student become successful.

Conclusion

We hope these questions will help better prepare you and your child for an online education.

Please visit our website to learn more and decide for yourself if we are the right fit for you and your child. At the Virtual Learning Academy, we believe that student-centered learning provides every student with the opportunity to customize their learning experience in a way that best meets their needs.

Connecting students to engaging, exciting, and rigorous learning so they can pursue their dreams, interests and aspirations...it's what we do!

Come learn with us!

Contact Us

ABOUT

VLACS is an online virtual school that provides middle school, high school, and adult students with the freedom to learn anywhere, anytime.

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