



VLACS

Elementary Parents Guide

Grades 3-5

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We are excited that your child is here to learn with us. We believe that parents and caregivers are partners in their child's online learning experience and that your help is critical to your child's success.

This grade 3-5 guide will provide general information to support your child and outline the instructor's role as well. If you have specific questions about your child's courses, your child's instructor is here for you.

Most importantly, please remember to be flexible and patient with yourself and your learner as you both adjust to the VLACS elementary program. It takes time to become fully acclimated to the curriculum, expectations, and structure of our online program. Your level of support will change as your child gets older.

Please Note:

VLACS serves many students with IEPs and 504 plans. By state law, a student's local school district is responsible for the creation, maintenance, and implementation of an IEP, and therefore it is the local school that provides special education supports and services. Families should share a student's IEP or 504 with VLACS School Counseling so we can work with you to determine how best to meet the student's needs in these circumstances.



Parent's Role

Parents and caregivers play the critical role of “learning coach”. Learning coaches are present and engaged to monitor the child’s understanding and be available to support as needed. For our elementary students, this means parents and caregivers will help navigate technology, including:

- Accessing lessons
- Submitting assignments
- Maintaining a consistent schedule
- Creating a dedicated workspace

Pace & Schedule

VLACS courses take time. On average, you can expect to spend 60-90 minutes per lesson (including its assignment) for each core course. Therefore, one of the most important tools for your child’s success is a well-planned schedule. Consider the following as you plan your child’s pace and schedule:

- **Daily and Weekly Schedule:** Help your student create a daily and weekly schedule that balances school time with breaks and extra-curricular activities. At first, you may need to schedule extra breaks as your student is getting into their school routine. As they build stamina, adjust the schedule to include longer stretches of lesson and assignment time. Weekly and monthly meetings with instructors should also be on your calendar. You may need to tweak your child’s schedule based on time commitments throughout the year.

- **Pace Plan:** Set time aside at the beginning of each day or week to review what needs to be completed and create a “to do” list of specific assessments and when they are due. The pacing information on the gradebook and via the Calendar icon in Canvas can be helpful when setting weekly goals for submissions. Most courses require three submissions per week to stay on pace. Review student’s gradebook/progress, regularly checking for missing assignments and assignments needing to be redone.
- **Movement Breaks:** Movement breaks are brain breaks. VLACS courses require a lot of focus. Movement breaks allow the brain to receive a boost of oxygen and reset. This can help increase focus and break any negative patterns when students (and learning coaches) are feeling overwhelmed or stuck. Add five-minute breaks to your schedule to give your brain a chance to refocus.
- **Vacation and Time Off:** If you are planning a vacation or break from your courses, reach out to your child’s instructor. If necessary, your instructor can adjust your child’s pace plan to best meet your family’s completion date goal.
- **Weekly Activity Meetings:** Each week, your teacher will host a weekly activity meeting. These are open to all students and required for full-time students. Be sure to include weekly activity meetings in your calendar. These are times for your student to interact with other grade-level students in a fun, engaging activity.

These tools will help you support your child’s planning and time management:

- [Homework Planner](#)
- [Creating Daily and Weekly Schedules](#)



Materials & Work Space

Students benefit from having a dedicated space for schoolwork – a physical environment that makes it easier for them to focus and distinguish between work time and break time.

Likewise, an organized digital workspace free of distractions is a more productive workspace. Help your child create digital folders for them to house assignments for each of their courses, and help them create a naming system so they can easily find their assignments when it's time to upload them for submission. Finally, please make sure you are using one of our most compatible browsers: Google Chrome, Firefox, or Safari. Consider the following as you help organize your child's materials and workspace:

- **Workspace:** Keep the work area free from distractions. House all materials needed to complete schoolwork including a laptop or tablet, paper, pencils, markers/crayons, scissors, and glue. This will likely serve as an ideal location for weekly meetings, as well. It is best if students can sit in a chair at a table or desk.
- **Materials Preparation:** Prepare materials ahead of time - print all worksheets needed for the week, or make sure the workbook pages are ready for your child. Look ahead at the science lessons, or "specials" classes to make sure you have materials ready for experiments and/or activities. These are listed in the course by module.

These tools will help you support your child's planning and time management:

- [Materials Management](#)
- [Digital Materials Management](#)



Feedback & Communication

The partnership between VLACS instructors and parents/caregivers to support a child's learning requires regular communication. This communication occurs in weekly and monthly meetings, written feedback, care calls, and emails. Please be aware that all meetings will take place in the instructor's Zoom room. Both the child and the instructor prepare for these meetings by:

- Dressing for school
- Joining from their designated workspace
- Removing distractions
- Turning their webcams on
- Bringing any materials that may assist during the meeting, (e.g. paper and pencil)

Consider the following as you prepare to communicate with your child's instructor:

- **Monthly Meetings:** Make sure to be present during monthly check-in meetings with your child's instructor and be prepared with any questions or concerns.
- **Weekly Meetings:** During weekly meetings, parents do not need to be visible in the meeting, but should be in the same room in case support is needed. You can aid your student in getting ready for their weekly meeting by helping them prepare questions on lessons or assessments they would like to review.
- **Feedback:** You should review teacher feedback on assignments with your student and guide them as to how to revise or how to communicate with their instructor should they need additional support. It is important to remind your child that learning is about making mistakes and learning from them.
- **Concerns:** Communicate any concerns or observations with your student's instructor; they are there to offer suggestions and support. As a learning coach, one of your responsibilities is to assist your student in communicating with their teacher.



These resources will help your student understand growth mindset and goal setting:

- [Growing Your Mind](#)
- [Developing a Growth Mindset](#)
- [Developing a Growth Mindset with SMART Goals](#)

Work Completion & Submission

VLACS courses include a mix of written assignments, video submissions, and multiple choice quizzes and assessments. All submissions should be a student's own, original work. Consider the following as you coach your child during work completion:

- **Parents as Facilitators:** Parents should act as "learning coaches" and need to be available during school work times in order to support students, answer questions and check in. Check for lesson understanding with your student after they have read/completed a lesson. If your student cannot explain/talk about each topic, then review that section together.
- **Submitting Assessments:** VLACS recommends PDF submissions. Look over the assignment directions and rubric with your student to ensure they have met the assignment requirements before submitting.

- **Photo and Video Submissions:** If submitting a picture of work completed, please refer to the guidelines linked at the top of the course page to make sure the work is legible. Students can use the computer's camera by clicking on "media" in the dropbox to submit videos. [Guidelines and Tips For Improving Submission Photos](#).
- **Consistent Practice:** Regular practice is critical to learning. To this end, your student should be completing and submitting work regularly. Your schedule might be unique, but your student should be actively engaged in their learning on a consistent basis.
- **Quizzes and Assessments:** As a learning coach, you can help your student read a quiz question, but please do not provide the answer or lead your student to the correct answer. Student mistakes are how teachers know what we need to review with students. Multiple attempts are allowed for each quiz and assessment. Moreover, mistakes are okay! Students learn from revisiting errors and correcting mistakes.
- **Demonstrating Students' Ability:** Submitted assignments should demonstrate the student's ability; therefore, drawings and writing assignments should be completed by the student. By fifth grade, your student should be writing or typing their own assessments. Google voice to text is a great way to get your students started with producing their work digitally.
- **Learning Coach and Cheerleader:** Be excited and positive about your student's learning! You are your student's role model when it comes to creating a positive learning environment, navigating new concepts, and asking for help when it's needed.

This resource explains how to create a PDF for submission:

- [How to Create a PDF](#)

Competency Assessments & Discussion-Based Assessments (DBAs)

VLACS is a competency-based program. Competencies represent knowledge and skills that a student must master in a particular course in order to progress in their learning.

Competency assessments are assessments used to determine students' mastery of the competencies. Each module of your child's courses will have a competency defined as "I can..." statements and at least one competency assessment. Students have to earn an 85% or higher on these competency assessments in order to demonstrate competency and receive credit for the module completion.

These assessments are noted with a bullseye icon in your coursepage. One such competency assessment is the Discussion-Based Assessment (DBA), which instructors complete with children at the end of each module. If a student does not earn an 85% on a competency assessment, such as a DBA, they will receive feedback, may get help from their teacher, and will have to redo the assessment. When it comes to DBAs, it is important that students review and prepare notes for the DBA questions in advance of the assessment.

Consider the following as you help prepare your student to reach and demonstrate competency:

- **Review:** Upon the completion of a module, help your child review the main concepts covered before their weekly meeting. These are provided at the beginning and end of the module. This is a good time for learning coaches to encourage students to reflect and expand upon the skills they have learned.
- **Continued Practice:** If your student does not pass a competency assessment on the first attempt, read the feedback from your child's instructor, spend time practicing the concepts that proved tricky for your child, provide some extra help, or advise your child to ask for help from their instructor or the VLACS helpdesk. Then, have your child retake the assessment.

- **Discussion-Based Assessment (DBA):** At the completion of each module, students will have a discussion of the key concepts and skills in the module with their instructor. As a learning coach, you can help your student prepare notes for this “DBA” or run through a practice with them. This is a time for the instructor to check for understanding and mastery of competencies. Parents should be present in the room, but not participating in this conversation.

Full-Time VLACS Student Specifics

Full-Time VLACS students have specific requirements in order to maintain full-time status. For more information on the full-time program and its requirements, please contact our school counselors at schoolcounseling@vlacs.org. Please review the following specifics of our full-time program:

- **Weekly Activity Meetings:** Each week, your teacher will host a weekly activity meeting. These are open to all students and required for full-time students. Be sure to include weekly activity meetings in your calendar. These are times for your student to interact with other grade-level students in a fun, engaging activity. The Weekly Activity calendar can be found on the course homepage.
- **Advisor:** Each full-time student is assigned a VLACS advisor. This person will support the family in signing up for courses and understanding state and VLACS requirements.
- **Core Courses:** Check in with your VLACS advisor to ensure that your student is enrolled in all required courses. Please consult with your advisor prior to withdrawing from a course or changing a course level, as it may impact your student’s full-time status.
- **“Specials”:** Certain non-core courses are required by the state in a FT elementary program. You will work with a VLACS counselor to make a plan for completing these “specials” courses (e.g. art, PE, technology) to ensure that they are part of your schedule during the year.
- **Attendance:** Full-Time Elementary students are required to earn 5.5 credits per year (comprised of four, 1 credit core courses and three, .5 credit special courses). The Attendance Committee meets quarterly to ensure that our full-time students are meeting these attendance goals. VLACS measures attendance through submissions; you can support your full-time student by ensuring that they are submitting approximately two to three assignments in each course, each week.





Instructor's Role

VLACS instructors are experienced educators certified by the New Hampshire Department of Education. They act as your educational guides by providing one-on-one support and offering consistent feedback. They typically meet with their elementary students weekly to answer questions, provide support regarding course content, and complete Discussion-Based Assessments. They are also available during office hours and by appointment. You and your student will be in regular communication with your instructor through Zoom, assignment feedback, and email.

Pace & Schedule

The following outlines the instructor's role and responsibilities in supporting you as you establish and maintain a schedule and pace:

- **Consistent Communication:** Instructors regularly communicate with parents regarding pacing and estimated completion dates.
- **Pace Plans:** Instructors set up pace plans to meet student/family needs.
- **Monthly Meetings:** During monthly meetings, instructors answer questions, discuss student progress, review pace plans and make adjustments, as necessary.
- **Support with Schedules:** Instructors provide support in setting up daily/weekly schedules for students, considering individual needs, and adjusting accordingly as students progress and build independence.
- **Weekly Meetings:** Instructors set up recurring weekly meetings for students taking all core courses and are present and available for all scheduled meetings.
- **Vacations and Time Off:** Instructors communicate with families if any meetings will be missed due to illness or vacation.

Meeting Guidelines

Meetings between the student and their VLACS instructor provide the opportunity to build relationships, answer questions, and review the student's academic progress by means of a gradebook review and/or Discussion-Based Assessment. Instructors can clarify lesson content or assignment goals during this time, as well. The following outlines the instructor's role and responsibilities for holding meetings:

- **Recurring Meetings:** Instructors set up recurring meetings at the start of the courses
- **Activity Meetings:** Instructors schedule weekly activity meetings for students participating in grade-level core courses and communicate this schedule with parents. These are opportunities for students to engage together in fun activities.
- **Workspaces:** Instructors ensure their workspace is set up with limited distractions so that students can focus during weekly meetings.
- **Background:** Instructors limit the use of video filters/backgrounds and set up the background with limited distractions or curriculum-appropriate materials (calendars, artwork, academic-focused information).
- **Documentation:** Instructors document all meetings in our student information system and make notes when a meeting is missed or canceled.
- **Care Calls:** Instructors reach out to families when a student misses a meeting or does not submit assignments as planned.

Student Support

Our teachers are here to support your student in their learning. The following outlines our approach to and philosophy on student support:

- **Teacher Support:** VLACS courses are set up so for students to move through lessons and assignments independent of direct teacher instruction. VLACS instructors are here to support your students with concepts they are struggling with through scheduled meetings as outlined below.
- **We Are a Team:** Instructors aim to engage parents/families in their child's learning journey. Instructors offer support and suggestions and work as a team to support student growth.
- **Feedback Should Be Timely:** VLACS instructors believe feedback on assignments should be prompt to be most useful (within 2 working days of submission).
- **Academic Helpdesk:** VLACS provides students with access to an Academic Helpdesk 6 days a week during school and evenin hours. If a students teacher is not available, this is a great place to get help most anytime of day.

Competency Assessments & Discussion-Based Assessments (DBAs)

The following outlines the roles and responsibilities of instructors regarding competency assessment:

- **Competency Assessments:** As noted previously, certain assessments are identified as competency assessments, and the student must earn 85% or better on these. Instructors will provide feedback on these assessments so students understand mistakes and how to improve.
- **Discussion-Based Assessments:** Instructors complete DBA conversations with the student to assess their mastery of specific skills and concepts at the end of most modules. DBAs should be a conversation between the student and the instructor.
- **Reassessment, if necessary:** If a student does not demonstrate competency on their first attempt, instructors communicate the skill areas that need improvement and schedule a time to reassess.



Contact Us

ABOUT

Our mission is to provide learners with rigorous, personalized, flexible learning via a relationship-focused, online experience designed to ensure college, career, and life readiness.

WEBSITE:

vlacs.org

PHONE:

603-778-2500

GENERAL INFORMATION:

information@vlacs.org

SCHOOL COUNSELING:

SchoolCounseling@vlacs.org

TECH SUPPORT:

helpdesk@vlacs.org
603.778.2500 ext. 2

ADDRESS:

19 Hampton Road
Exeter, NH 03833