

# VHS Learning Handbook

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## Welcome to VHS Learning!



Welcome to VHS Learning!

Since our inception in 1996, VHS, Inc. has expanded opportunities for high school students through innovative programs that prepare them for the future.

Today, we unite hundreds of schools and students from around the world to share resources and ideas, provide new educational options to students and prepare educators with the technological skills necessary to enhance learning experiences both online and in the classroom.

Our nonprofit is dedicated to education first. Our goal is to provide every student with the opportunity to reach their fullest potential. At VHS Learning, there is no one-size-fits-all model. We work closely with each school, student, and teacher, to provide a personal educational experience. We believe in the value of teacher-led instruction to help deepen and expand learning and provide students with guidance and support throughout the educational process.

On behalf of our entire team, I invite you to explore our offerings ([VHSLearning.org](https://VHSLearning.org)) and discover how we can help you achieve your educational goals.

Sincerely,  
Carol DeFuria

President & CEO  
VHS Learning (VHS, Inc.)

# Overview, Mission, and Beliefs

## Overview

VHS, Inc. is a nonprofit organization providing online courses to schools and students across the country and around the world. Course offerings include hundreds of courses, as well as professional development opportunities for faculty. We offer courses for students at all levels, including Advanced Placement, honors, and credit recovery. We also offer courses for student enrichment, initial credit, and credit recovery. Schools across the United States and around the world utilize our program, and as such it is each school's responsibility to understand any local requirements for participation in online courses within their state/local district.

The hallmark of our courses is the collaboration between students, teachers, and administration. Students learn with and from their instructor and other students in small online classrooms. Districts participating with us receive not only courses and instruction, but also the infrastructure necessary to operate a robust online program, including ongoing professional development for on-site mentors and teachers, orientation for students, assistance with course selection and registration, and technical support.

## Mission and Vision

Our **mission** is to provide high school students with world-class online courses and teachers that ignite a passion for learning.

Our **vision** is to cultivate a diverse, global learning community and foster a safe and supportive learning environment that nurtures students and gives them the unique educational choices they need to be successful in careers and life.

## Beliefs

- All students deserve equal access to quality educational choices that help them reach their fullest potential.
- Every student should be inspired by an educational experience in high school.
- Diverse classroom communities help students value differing perspectives, develop empathy for others, and thrive and succeed in our global society.
- Students learn best when they are supported by caring and dedicated teachers who guide and nurture their development.
- Learning is a social endeavor. Supportive, human connections and flexible online experiences expand educational opportunities and encourage lifelong learning.



## Strategies for Success

### What's Unique about Us

We are unique because we offer courses where learning with and from each other is important! In our cohort-based classes, you will have a teacher who works with you and your classmates to create a community where you will have regular class discussions and opportunities to work in groups. Given this unique aspect of our courses, it is essential that you stay on track. Here are some tips to help you have a successful experience in your class.

### Pace Yourself

Former students shared the most important lesson they learned from taking an online class. Almost every student gave the same advice: **Don't save all your work until just before the due date!** Waiting until the due date will leave you without enough time to pass in high quality work. **Help yourself by planning and setting goals to complete work before it is due.**

### Attend Class Regularly

Our classes are flexible, allowing you to do your work in the evening or during the weekend. With flexibility comes responsibility. Though the minimum login requirement is 3 times per week, students who are successful login at least 4-5 times per week. Honors and Advanced Placement students should login 5 times per week to maximize success.

### Plan Ahead

There are times when life is hectic – **if you have a valid reason that you might not meet course deadlines, communicate with your teacher ahead of time.** Often your teacher will be accommodating to your needs, but it is difficult to adjust after you've been absent without notice.

### Get to Know Your Site Coordinator

Your site coordinator is the person at your school (or at our office, for individually enrolled students) who can help you sort out any problems you may encounter. Check-in with your site coordinator regularly and ask them for help prioritizing your work or for tips and strategies for success. Don't wait until you are really struggling before you ask for help!

### Suggested Plan: How you might approach your work

- **Check the News area for messages from your teacher**, such as reminders or important updates.
- **Review the Overview lesson**, paying attention to the table of assignments and activities. Print the table to create a plan and track your work.
- **Pay close attention to due dates.** Although most activities in paced courses are due at the end of the week, some (such as discussions) have mid-week due dates.
- **Check your Private Topic regularly** to see if you have messages from your teacher!
- **Focus on your goals of the day:** participate in class discussions, complete a written assignment, check in with a group. Your work will vary, so tackle assignments consistently and be sure to read and post to discussions at least a few times during the week!

## Getting Help

### Self-advocacy

In addition to time management skills and strong work habits, our students develop self-advocacy skills. Self-advocacy means taking responsibility and initiative to get what you need, not waiting for others to act for you. For some students, this skill comes naturally, while for others it takes effort to improve in this area.

**One way to be a strong self-advocate is to ask your teacher and site coordinator questions.** It is natural to have questions. The answer to some will be clear, but when the answer is not clear, communication is key. **We can't answer a question or solve a problem if we don't know the question or problem exists!**

### Tips for Requesting Help

Here are some tips for getting help from your teacher or site coordinator:

- Don't be shy! Other students probably have the same question as you.
- Make your questions specific – providing detail helps your teacher solve your problem or provide information that will help you understand the concept more fully.
- Be patient! Teachers are expected to respond to questions within 1 day, Monday through Friday. Many teachers respond faster, but please give your teachers 24 hours to respond.
- Don't be afraid to ask your site coordinator for help. If you are struggling to get answers to your questions, ask your site coordinator to call our office (978-897-1900) or submit a [support request](#). We are always happy to assist you.

### Asking Questions

Each class has discussion boards for specific types of questions. Students will be provided with additional information within each course. **Students should not use email to communicate with teachers.** When students post questions in the course, we are best able to help.

- **Have a Question?** – Most classes contain this discussion, where students ask questions about course navigation, locating or posting assignments, or assignment expectations.
- **Private Topic** – Each student has a private topic (PT) where they can communicate privately with their teacher about grades, information about absences, or other confidential matters.

### Additional Suggestions

- Be sure to complete the Student Orientation that is shared within the learning management system. This provides important information about accessing lessons and submitting work.
- Review the Student Success Module for tips and strategies to improve success in online classes.
- Complete assignments in a Google doc or word processor and copy/paste the work into the assignment. This is helpful in case a technical issue creates a problem for posting work.
- Use the [Service Center](#) to submit a support request for technical support.

You can also call our office for support. We can be reached at 978-897-1900 between 8AM and 5PM Eastern time, Monday - Friday.

## Enrollment Policies

### Add/Drop Period and Withdrawals

This policy applies to paced courses only. Refer to the Self-Paced and Credit Recovery sections of this handbook for add/drop policies related to those programs.

The first week of each semester in the fall and spring is the add/drop period. Students may add courses within the first week of class. Add/drop deadlines are outlined in the [calendar](#).

After the fall semester add/drop period ends, all fall and full-year course seats are considered used. Should a student in a fall semester course (1 seat) or full-year course (2 seats) drop their course after the fall add/drop period, these seats may no longer be used.

Students who withdraw before the add/drop deadline will not receive a grade for the course. Students who withdraw after the add/drop deadline will have a grade of 'W' (Withdraw) recorded in the VHS Learning Student Information System.

Tuition refunds, if applicable, depend on the date the student dropped. The official student drop date is the date the student was dropped from his or her course, as noted within the VHS Learning Student Information System. Refer to the Tuition Refund Policy for more information.

### Advanced Placement (AP): Fees

All AP enrollments are subject to an AP fee, due to the additional costs of managing the AP program. Certain AP courses also require a lab fee. Refer to the [course catalog](#) for pricing and details.

### Age Requirements

All VHS Learning course descriptions indicate the allowed grade-level for student enrollments. Some courses require students to be aged 13 or over, to ensure students meet COPPA requirements for software being used in the course. Read course descriptions carefully to ensure age and grade requirements are met. VHS Learning does not enroll students aged 21 or older.

### Audit Requests

VHS Learning does not have an official audit status, though we support a school's decision to allow a student to remain enrolled in a class for the purpose of enrichment rather than earning credit. If a student wishes to audit a course, the site coordinator must submit a [support request](#) so VHS Learning staff can communicate with the teacher about the student's status. The following guidelines apply:

- VHS Learning will tell the teacher:
  - the school will interpret the grade locally as a withdrawal or audit,
  - they should award grades of zero for missing work, and
  - they do *\*not\** need to email the site coordinator and inform them the student is not submitting work.
- The site coordinator will tell the student:
  - the teacher will not grade work unless it is submitted before the late work period for the assignment has expired,
  - they should not engage with other students in discussion boards or blogs/wikis,
  - they can attend virtual classroom sessions that are scheduled for the class, and
  - they should disregard the weekly grade email sent from the VHS Learning student information system.

- The site coordinator will disregard the weekly grade emails for the student and will ensure the parents/guardians are aware of expectations and the student's status.
- The student transcript will show the student's earned grade, including zeros for work that was not submitted or was submitted after the late work period. This will likely result in a failing grade; schools should note the course on their local transcript in accordance with local grade reporting policies.

## Canceling Courses with Low Enrollments

VHS Learning reserves the right to cancel courses with fewer than 8 students enrolled. If canceling a course is necessary, VHS Learning will do everything possible to place students in a future offering of the same course or enroll students in a similar course. Canceled enrollments are eligible for a full refund.

## English Language Learners (ELs)

The VHS Learning program is offered in English. To successfully access course content, students must possess appropriate English language skills. Teachers are provided with guidance on accommodating students with minimal to moderate language needs. Schools should assess student language levels before enrollment to ensure students understand course materials. We recommend that students meet or exceed a WIDA score of 4 in reading and writing. By enrolling an English Language Learner, schools acknowledge they are willing to and capable of supporting language needs for their students locally. It is expected that communication between teachers, students, families, and school administrators will be in English.

## General Enrollment Protocol for Paced Courses

Enrollment policies for Self-Paced and Credit Recovery programs are found in the appropriate sections of the handbook.

Site coordinators enroll students in VHS Learning online courses by accessing the VHS Learning [Student Information System](#). It is the site coordinator's responsibility to manage their school's enrollments and to understand the local requirements for enrollment in online courses at their school district.

- Student enrollments are processed through the end of the add period, as noted in the published academic [calendar](#). After the add period, students are only added to classes at the discretion of VHS Learning staff.
- After the fall semester add period, all fall and full-year course seats are considered used. Should a student in a fall semester-length course (1 seat) or full-year course (2 seats) drop their course after the fall add period, the seats may no longer be used.
- Drops and withdrawals (drops after Week 1) are processed by the site coordinator, after communication with the student. If assistance is needed, submit a support request in the [Service Center](#).
- There may be differences between the class roster in the course and registration during the add/drop period, due to a delay between registration updates and class roster updates within the Student Information System. The Student Information System is considered the most accurate class list.
- Registration for paced courses occurs between May and September (fall and full-year courses) and May and January (spring courses).

## Individual Enrollment: School Contact Policy

When a student enrolls directly with VHS Learning, the student is provided a site coordinator by VHS Learning. The VHS Learning site coordinator will be the student and parent/guardian's primary point of contact and will engage with the teacher as needed to discuss student progress.

If a student or parent provides contact information for an employee of the local school district, the VHS Learning site coordinator will include that contact on communications with VHS Learning teachers and coordinators, unless the parent requests, in writing, to not communicate with the school. Written requests can be made via a support request in the VHS Learning [Service Center](#) or via email to the VHS Learning site coordinator assigned to support the student.

## Initial Enrollment Numbers

Although VHS Learning courses are typically capped at 25 enrollments, initial enrollment numbers may be higher than 25 students in courses where there has historically been attrition during the first few weeks of the course. This practice minimizes waitlists for high demand courses and ensures most students can enroll in a VHS Learning course of their choice.

## Materials and Lab Kits

Certain courses contain materials that students will be required to obtain on their own, including books available at local libraries or common materials to complete simple lab exercises in the home environment. Materials that students are required to obtain on their own, if applicable, are listed in the course description in the [course catalog](#). If a student is unable to procure the materials, they should work with their site coordinator to try to obtain the materials. If they are unable to obtain needed materials with site coordinator assistance, the student should inform their teacher and submit a support request in the [Service Center](#) with details about the situation.

Certain courses require the purchase of a lab kit so that students have access to materials for a robust, hands-on lab program. Courses with lab kits and lab kit fees are noted in the course description in the [course catalog](#). Students must care for lab materials responsibly, follow directions carefully, and work independently to complete these labs. Students and a responsible adult will complete a Lab Materials Use Agreement that will be signed and uploaded to their course. Refer to the Waiver Requirements policy for additional information. Lab kits shipped internationally will incur additional shipping and customs fees.

## Registration Dates

Visit the [VHS Learning calendar](#) to see all current registration dates and general semester dates, including deadlines for confirming term and semester grades.

## Registration: Gender Identity and Legal Name

It is of utmost importance that students are able to be themselves in our program and that their personal information is protected according to state and federal laws. Recognizing that the approach to student records varies in different areas, site coordinators are expected to follow local requirements for registration in the VHS Learning Student Information System. In states that require schools to update records to reflect a student's identified gender and name at the student's request, the site coordinator is encouraged to register the student with their identified name and gender rather than legal name and sex assigned at birth.

**Special note about AP enrollments:** College Board registration requires a student's legal name and has a field for preferred name. It is our understanding that the student's preferred name (if provided) is displayed in AP Classroom. Site coordinators should ensure the student's name in the VHS Learning student information system matches the name in AP Classroom. A member of the VHS Learning team is happy to discuss this as needed. If you need help, file a support request in the VHS Learning [Service Center](#).

VHS Learning will update the name displayed in the learning management system for students who use a different name than their legal name due to gender identity or cultural preference and are not able to have it entered as such in the student information system by the site coordinator. Students, their site coordinator, or their teacher can request this change by submitting a support request through the VHS Learning [Service Center](#). Requests to update the display name are evaluated by and approved by VHS Learning staff, after which time changes will be applied to the learning management system. The legal and preferred name will both be displayed in the student information system.

A student's legal name will remain unchanged in the VHS Learning Student Information System unless a site coordinator updates the student's record to change the student's legal name. The student's legal name will be reported on the VHS Learning transcript.

## Seat Allocation

A seat is defined as one confirmed or waitlisted enrollment in one class during a given enrollment period. If a student enrolls in two different courses in the same semester, that counts as two seats for that semester. If a student enrolls in a full year (two-semester) course, that counts as one seat each semester (two seats total). Students placed on waiting lists are counted as utilizing a seat.

Schools may register students for both the fall and spring semesters as soon as registration begins for the next academic year, typically in mid-May. Credit recovery course enrollments are not included in school membership bundles, although schools can purchase credit recovery enrollment bundles at a discount. Each credit recovery course enrollment uses one seat and is worth .5 credits.

Self-Paced course enrollments are included in membership bundles and use 1 or 2 seats, depending on whether the course is a 0.5 credit or 1 credit course.

If you are participating in VHS Learning through a school consortium, contact your Consortium Director to determine the number of seats allocated to your school.

After the fall and spring add periods, all academic year, paced enrollment seats are considered used. Students who drop a course before the end of the add period can enroll in another course, or a different student may use the enrollment seat(s).

Self-paced students have a 7-day grace period to drop the course from the start date. If a student drops a Self-Paced course after the grace period noted, the enrollment seat(s) are considered used.

## Student Selection

Courses are for high school and middle school students under 21. [Contact us](#) for information on special offerings.

Time management and self-motivation are essential skills that must be considered when choosing students to participate in this program. Participation in an online course requires independence, personal responsibility, and strong communication skills. Students must plan their work, be responsive to deadlines, and be conscientious in completing assigned tasks independently and in groups.

Typically, site coordinators manage recruitment and enrollment of students. Site coordinators work with school counselors to identify students with the appropriate skillset who have an interest in taking online courses. Site coordinators explain student responsibilities, help students become familiar with course choices and the various course requirements, ensure students have the appropriate prerequisites for the courses they choose, ensure students are of the appropriate grade level for the courses they choose, obtain administrative approval for their student enrollments, and enroll students in selected courses. They also ensure students understand the rigor and pacing of the VHS Learning program and the level of active participation required from students. Students not meeting course requirements must get override approval from VHS Learning before enrollment.

Courses are also available to home school students or other students seeking high school course credits. These students may enroll in VHS Learning courses via the VHS Learning [website](#).

## Truancy/Student Non-Participation

This policy applies to paced courses only. Refer to the Self-Paced and Credit Recovery sections of the handbook for truancy policies related to those programs.

Teachers and site coordinators share responsibility for monitoring student attendance. Students and site coordinators must notify teachers if a student will be absent from class for more than 4 days. Absence is defined as a failure to submit work to their VHS Learning course.

A student that has not submitted work to their class for 14 calendar days without an excusable reason for absence, as defined in the Excusable Reasons for Absence policy, or pre-approval, is considered truant and may be dropped from their class.

If a student has not submitted work for 14 days, the teacher will submit a support request so that a member of the VHS Learning team can communicate with the school about the absence. The teacher should include an overview of the efforts made to reach the student and site coordinator before submitting the support request.

VHS Learning will contact the student's site coordinator to confirm whether there was an excusable reason for the absence. If the site coordinator does not respond, VHS Learning will call the school administrator.

**If an excusable reason for absence is confirmed**, the site coordinator will work with the teacher and VHS Learning curriculum and instruction staff to create a plan for the student to complete the course. The Incomplete and Extension Request policies apply in this instance. The teacher and site coordinator are expected to work with the student prior to an extended absence so they can re-engage with the course and complete it successfully.



**If there was not an excusable reason for the absence**, the student will be dropped from class and a grade of W (withdraw) will be noted in the VHS Learning student information system. This grade should be interpreted on the local transcript in accordance with the local handbook.

In cases where the student's local school does not allow the student to drop the course, the student will remain in the class but will not be allowed to make up missed work from the absence. Work will be assessed as it is submitted; grades of zero will be input for missing assignments.

## **Tuition Refund**

Individual tuition students who officially withdraw from their full-year, AP, semester, or Self-Paced course through notification to VHS Learning will receive a refund of tuition as outlined below. The Credit Recovery Refund policy is outlined in the Credit Recovery section of the handbook

- A full refund, less a \$25 administration fee, will be granted prior to the start of class.
- A 75% tuition refund will be granted if a withdrawal occurs during the first week of the course.
- No tuition refund will be granted after the first week of the course
- The withdrawal date is the date the enrollment is dropped within the VHS Learning Student Information System or the date the drop is requested through a VHS Learning support request (whichever occurs first).
- Tuition refunds are not granted for unused seats purchased in membership bundles.

## **Waitlists**

The number of students enrolled in a course is typically limited to 25. Students are automatically placed on the waitlist if a course is full, in the order in which they registered. If space becomes available in the course before the add period ends, waitlisted students are added to the course in the order that they were registered. Once classes begin, site coordinators may elect to remove students from waitlists and register them into courses that have openings. Students who are waitlisted count towards the total number of seats used for the semester.

## **Waiver Requirements**

Some courses, including lab science courses and physical education courses, require students and their parent/guardian (if student is under age 18) to sign waiver documentation and upload the waiver to the course. Waivers, if required, are outlined in course descriptions in the [course catalog](#). Waivers must be returned during the first weeks of the course, as outlined in Week 1 lesson documents. Students who do not return the required waiver documentation within the expected time will not be allowed to complete assignments for which the waiver is required.

## **Academic Policies**

### **Academic Calendar**

Academic year courses are either semester-length or full-year (two semester). The fall and spring semesters are 15 weeks in duration. Full-year courses are 33 weeks in duration with a break between weeks 15 and 16. Semester calendars are available on the VHS Learning website prior to the start of each academic year.

All students and teachers must follow the VHS Learning [academic calendar](#) as it pertains to VHS Learning courses. Often school calendars differ from the VHS Learning calendar. When calendars differ, the VHS Learning calendar and course schedule take precedence. Should a student be unable to attend class due



to a school vacation or calendar issue, it is essential that the student and their site coordinator inform teachers in advance so arrangements can be made to work ahead or make up work. If a student does not make alternative arrangements with teachers in advance in cases of scheduling conflicts, late work policies and penalties apply.

Self-paced course enrollment policies can be found in the Self-Paced Program section of the VHS Learning handbook.

Credit recovery courses are self-paced, 8-week courses with weekly start dates.

Please submit a support request via the VHS Learning [Service Center](#) for information on courses that follow unique academic calendars.

### **Advanced Placement: AP Classroom**

VHS Learning students are expected to access and utilize AP Classroom resources as directed by their VHS Learning teacher. This requires students to have a College Board account.

### **Advanced Placement: Predicted Score Requests**

VHS Learning teachers are not expected to provide colleges with predicted AP scores for VHS Learning students. VHS Learning teachers do not have access to the student performance data needed to make a valid prediction of success on an AP exam.

### **Advanced Placement: Summer Work**

Paced AP courses require summer assignments that are submitted during Week 1 of the course and are graded by the VHS Learning teacher. Summer assignments cover essential prerequisite content and are expected to take approximately 5 hours to complete. Students that enroll in an AP course in late summer have flexibility to turn the work in through Week 3, though students are encouraged to finish summer assignments prior to course start if possible.

Summer assignments are linked in the course description of each AP course in the [catalog](#).

### **Advanced Placement: Testing**

Students enrolled in AP courses are expected to take AP exams. Students who are failing their AP class need not take the AP exam. Exam results do not affect the student's course grade or future enrollment in courses.

It is the student's school's responsibility to order and administer AP exams. Schools must set up exam only sections so that students can successfully access and complete work in VHS Learning AP Classroom sections.

Individually enrolled students must locate a site in their local area where they can take the exam. The College Board provides [information for homeschooled and virtual students](#). Be aware of the timeline for this process; the College Board recommends contacting their AP Services for Students number (888-225-5427 or 212-632-1780) in September to obtain names of local testing sites as exams must be ordered during the fall.

## Communication: Notification of Student Tragedy

In the unfortunate event of a tragedy concerning a student or faculty member, please contact us as soon as possible via phone (978-897-1900) or a support request via the [Service Center](#).

In circumstances involving a student, we will:

1. Contact the student's school to offer support and assistance in the case of a student tragedy.
2. Email teachers of the other students from the school where the tragedy occurred, so teachers can be flexible with absences or late work submission.
3. Email the site coordinator of the other students in the class in which the tragedy occurred, to make them aware of the situation.
4. Work with the teacher in the course in which the student was enrolled to determine the best method of communication to the students in the class and offer additional assistance and support to the teacher.

Examples of situations in which we should be notified include the death of a student, teacher, or site coordinator, or a tragedy concerning a student at a member school that the school has reason to believe may impact their students taking online classes.

## Course Levels

Each course is designated as credit recovery, standard, honors, or Advanced Placement. Standard courses are considered college preparatory and should be identified as such at the student's school. Some courses are designated appropriate for gifted and talented middle school students. The level of each course is indicated in the VHS Learning course [catalog](#), which also contains prerequisite skills and course grade level requirements.

The following parameters can be used as guidelines for courses:

- A standard (college preparatory) level class requires approximately 6 hours per week.
- An honors level class requires approximately 8 hours per week.
- An AP level class requires approximately 10 hours per week.
- Credit recovery courses require approximately 40 hours of work for each 0.5 credit.
- The level and credit earned in a Self-Paced course dictates the approximate time to complete the course:
  - 1 credit AP: approximately 330 hours
  - 0.5 credit AP: approximately 170 hours
  - 1 credit standard: approximately 200 hours
  - 0.5 credit standard: approximately 95 hours

## Course Retakes

Students must adhere to local school policy regarding retaking our online courses. If allowed by the local school, a student may retake a course providing the following conditions are met:

1. The student has approval from his/her school to enroll in the course and the student or school pays the appropriate tuition or uses seats for the enrollment.
2. There is space available for the student wanting to repeat a course after spaces have been assigned to students taking the course for the first time.
3. The student received a failing final grade the first time the course was taken.

The student's school will decide how a replacement course will appear on the local transcript. The student should understand how a repeated course will impact their student's transcript and GPA.

## **Credit for Courses**

Local schools grant credit for VHS Learning courses. Courses taken through VHS Learning should receive the same credit and be listed on the student transcript in the same way as any other course offered through the school. Each VHS Learning semester course is worth 0.5 credit. Year-long courses are worth 1 credit. Credit for credit recovery courses is at the discretion of each school. We recommend that VHS Learning courses be given the same level as traditional courses. For example, a VHS Learning AP course should be worth the same credit on a student's transcript as a local AP course.

## **Document Formats Allowed**

To ensure integrity of work and validity of student grades, students must submit work in formats that are compatible with our plagiarism detection tool. Teachers may ask students to resubmit work that has been shared in a format that is not compatible with our plagiarism detection tool, such as scanned images, screenshots, or other image-based files that contain text.

## **Due Dates**

Course dates and deadlines are based on the Eastern time zone. Students and teachers in different time zones should adjust their work habits to ensure they meet deadlines based on this time zone.

## **Excusable Reasons for Absence**

Paced VHS Learning courses include discussions and group work. It is expected that students are actively engaged with their peers each week.

VHS Learning does not recognize overall workload, motivation, studying for other courses or assessments at the local school, or sports and extra-curricular commitments as excusable reasons for absence. Students who have significant time commitments and cannot meet course pacing requirements should consider a Self-Paced VHS Learning course, if available.

Excusable reasons for absence include the following scenarios. A site coordinator must confirm the student's excusable reason for absence via email or [support request](#).

- Illnesses or accidents that require hospitalization
- Natural disasters or extreme weather events
- Family emergencies
- Traumatic experiences
- Concussions or medical conditions that prevent attendance at school.

## **Extended Absence (7 or more consecutive school days)**

This policy applies to students who are absent from a paced class for an extended period (greater than 7 consecutive school days) due to an excusable reason for absence. Shorter absences are managed by the VHS Learning teacher and VHS Learning administration under the Late Work policy. Students who are truant without reason for absence are subject to the Truancy policy.

If a student misses more than 7 consecutive school days because of an Excusable Reason for Absence, the site coordinator should submit a support request so that a member of the VHS Learning team can evaluate the situation and suggest an approach for supporting the student. Depending on the

circumstance of the student's absence and the course, a variety of approaches are used, including exempting assignments, extending weekly deadlines, or extending the course end date (which would require hiring a substitute at an additional charge).

VHS Learning can accommodate absence of up to four weeks in a semester-length class through varied approaches (as described above). If a student will be absent for more than four weeks in a semester-length course, they will be allowed to re-enroll in a future semester or Self-Paced version of the course at no charge, as it is unlikely a plan will be able to accommodate for that length of absence in a 15-week course.

If a student is absent for more than four weeks in a year-long course, VHS Learning will make every attempt to accommodate using the approaches listed above. Students who are absent for more than 8 total weeks in a year-long course will have missed too much of the course to be able to successfully rejoin the class.

### **Notes about re-enrollment**

VHS Learning will transfer grades for non-collaborative assignments completed in the initially attempted course. Student assignments will not be transferred from the initial course to the re-enrollment section.

The student will be expected to complete collaborative assignments and class discussions again in the new section of the course. It is expected that the student will have completed less than 50% of the initially attempted course.

Re-enrollment in the same section of a Credit Recovery or Self-Paced course should result in previous work being available to the student.

### **Concussion**

If a student has a concussion during their course, the school and site coordinator must take an active role in communicating the student's status and outlining expectations for how the student will complete their course. The preferred method of communication with us is via the VHS Learning [Service Center](#), to ensure all departments are aware of expectations.

The site coordinator must share the following information with VHS Learning via a support request:

- Student name
- VHS Learning course(s)
- What has the student been cleared to do in an academic setting?
- What are specific expectations for screen use and workload?
- Are any global exemptions/reductions being made in the local school?
- Target date for return to full learning

Site coordinators can use the [Accommodations Form](#) to share any relevant accommodations for the student. Additional details can be found in this [Concussion Support at VHS Learning document](#).

### **Other Medical Issues**

If a student is absent from school due to a medical issue lasting more than a few days, the school and site coordinator must take an active role in communicating the student's status. The preferred method of communication with VHS Learning is via the [Service Center](#).

VHS Learning requires verification of absence due to medical issues. It is preferred that a medical professional provides a letter confirming the duration of time the student is excused from attending school. The letter should not contain specific medical information or a specific diagnosis, but it must include a date for returning to school and any limitations on the student. If a letter from a medical professional is not provided, the student's school counselor must verify that the student was or will be absent from school for a specific period.

## **Extension Requests**

This policy applies to paced VHS Learning courses only. Information about Self-Paced and Credit Recovery extensions can be found in those sections of the handbook.

Students can request an extension to complete work past the course end date if there was an excusable reason for absence that prohibited the student from completing their work on time (see Excusable Reasons for Absence policy). Extensions must be formalized between the teacher and their VHS Learning curriculum/instructional coordinator. Once finalized, the teacher must post a private topic message that outlines the names of the assignments to be completed (or exempted), the deadline for turning in the assignments, and the amount of credit which will be granted for work passed in late.

Extensions are granted in two-week blocks of time for a maximum of one month. The student will be given a grade of Incomplete through the duration of the extension period, after which time a course grade will be finalized.

In extreme cases where a student is unable to access their online classroom for an extended period, such as a student in a concussion protocol or with a significant medical issue, a combination of the following solutions might apply. Decisions about these situations are made collaboratively between the student's school and VHS Learning:

- exempting non-critical work
- student withdrawal from the course
- re-enrolling student in an upcoming semester or a Self-Paced course, if available
- allowing the student to complete work at his/her own pace with the support of a local teacher or school administrator.

## **Failing Grade/Numerically Not Possible to Pass**

VHS Learning makes every effort to support students who are struggling to be successful in their course. If there comes a time when a student is no longer able to pass a VHS Learning course because they have not submitted a significant portion of work and do not have an excusable reason for absence as defined in the Excusable Reasons for Absence policy, the following options will be made available to the student:

- Drop the course to focus on other courses in the face-to-face environment.
- Audit the course; see the Audit Requests policy for additional information.
- Stay enrolled in the course and the school will assign a local teacher to assess work and determine a final local grade for the course.

If a school does not choose an option for the student, they will remain enrolled in the course; any work submitted will be graded in accordance with the VHS Learning Late Work Policy.

## Final Exam Exemption

VHS Learning final exams are required to be completed, even if a school has a local policy that exempts students from completing final exams. Final exams are an important element of our data set and are reported as part of our accreditation improvement goals. Students are asked to make their best effort to complete the exam. Students may take the exam any time during the last week of their class. VHS Learning final exams do not carry the same weight as a typical final exam might and are designed to be completed in approximately 45 minutes (extended time is available as dictated by a 504 plan or IEP).

## Grade Availability

Current grade information is always available in the VHS Learning Student Information System. Data is refreshed nightly, and the Current Grade Average (CGA) visible to site coordinators represents the average of all term grades, including grade information entered the previous day.

Instructors are required to confirm term and semester grades for students at specified intervals (see the [VHS Learning Academic Calendar](#) for grading deadlines). Site coordinators are encouraged to regularly share CGA and term grade information with parents and guardians, especially if a student is struggling.

Parents and guardians receive weekly progress report emails and access to the VHS Learning Student Information System, if contact information is added to a student's account.

In addition to grade emails, students in Self-Paced courses receive a progress update email monthly. Teachers will input zeros on a regular basis to illustrate whether students are on track to finish by the course end date. Assignments can be submitted until the student's enrollment end date. Once work is submitted, the zeros will be replaced by the grade for the assignment.

Final grades for Credit Recovery courses are posted within two weeks of students completing all course work, or at the end of the Credit Recovery term.

## Grade Periods for Term and Semester Grades

### Grade periods for semester-length paced courses (fall and spring)

Term 1 Grade: The Term 1 Grade represents student work from weeks 1 through 8.

Term 2 Grade: The Term 2 Grade represents student work from weeks 9 through 15.

The Final Grade represents an average of the Term 1 and Term 2 grades.

### Grade periods for full-year paced courses

Fall Term 1 Grade represents student work from weeks 1 through 8.

Fall Term 2 Grade represents student work from weeks 9 through 15.

Spring Term 3 Grade represents student work from weeks 16 through 26.

Spring Term 4 Grade represents student work from weeks 27 through 33.

Final Grade: The Final Grade for full-year classes is the average of Term 1, 2, 3 and 4 grades.

### Grade periods for Self-Paced and Credit Recovery courses

Self-Paced and Credit Recovery courses have only one term grade that is calculated based on total points earned in the course compared to total points possible. Term grades for Self-Paced classes are reported at the discretion of the school, as outlined in the Self-Paced Program section of the Handbook.

## Grade Dispute Process: Final Course Average

If, after final grades have been confirmed, there is a question about the validity of a student's grade, the student should consult with their site coordinator and submit a support request so that the grade can be reviewed, following the communication process outlined above.

If it is determined that a student's grade is incorrect, the grade will be updated in the Student Information System so that the student or school can download an updated transcript. The following steps should be followed when a grade is in question:

1. Submit a [support request](#) with the student's name, the course name and section, and the reason for the requested change.
2. A curriculum/instructional coordinator will review the request, consulting with the course instructor and appropriate Associate Dean as warranted.
3. If approved, the curriculum/instructional coordinator will update the Student Information System and will note the final grade in the support case.
4. An updated transcript can be obtained from the Student Information System once the final grade is updated.

## Grade Dispute Process: Prior to End of Course

If, during the semester, there is a question about the validity of a student's grade, the student should consult with their site coordinator and then communicate with the teacher in the Private Topic to ask about the grade item in question. If the student cannot resolve the issue, they or their site coordinator should submit a support request. The request should include the student's name, course name and section, details about the grade in question, and steps that have been taken to resolve the issue with the teacher. A curriculum/instructional coordinator will review the request and consult with the teacher of the course. The decision will be shared with the teacher, student, and site coordinator and will be final.

## Grade Over 100%

Teachers are not able to confirm grades over 100% in the Student Information System. If a student has earned a score greater than 100% for a term, that grade will be confirmed as 100%. Students are not allowed to carry over additional points from one term to another.

## Grade Scale

VHS Learning utilizes a numerical scale with a grade of 60% indicating a passing score. A student may receive an "I" for an Incomplete if they are not able to finish the course. See Incomplete Grades for additional information on this policy. Instructors submit grades in numeric format (i.e., 100, 99, 98, etc.) and the grading system generates equivalent letter grades (i.e., A+, A, A-, etc.).

Schools are encouraged to record grades in local grading systems based on local policies and grade scales. For example, schools that implement a grade of 65% as passing are encouraged to take into consideration that our passing score is 60%. Schools that grade on a pass/fail basis are encouraged to convert our grades to P or F.

When converting numeric grades to letter grades, please use this scale, which is provided on transcripts in the VHS Learning Student Information System:

Letter Grade	Numeric Grade	Letter Grade	Numeric Grade
A+	97 - 100	C+	77 - 79
A	93 - 96	C	73 - 76
A-	90 - 92	C-	70 - 72
B+	87 - 89	D+	67 - 69
B	83 - 86	D	63 - 66
B-	80 - 82	D-	60 - 62
		F	00 - 59

## Grading: Term 1 Grade 50%

Recognizing that there are some students who take time to adjust to a paced, asynchronous course model, teachers will confirm a grade of 50% for any student whose **Term 1 grade** is 25% - 49%. Students whose grade is below 25% will have their numerical score entered in the SIS. This policy does not apply to Terms 2, 3, or 4.

## Incomplete Grades

The incomplete grade period is intended to allow flexibility at the end of a term if a student's grade might change due to additional grade entries. Teachers will input an incomplete (I) grade to allow a student additional time to complete coursework in alignment with relevant VHS Learning policies (Late Work, Special Education, Excusable Reasons for Absence, Medical, etc.).

Site coordinators can request an incomplete by emailing the teacher prior to grade reporting deadlines to provide relevant information about the student's situation.

When granting an incomplete, the teacher will identify specific assignments eligible to be completed, will specify the time allowed to complete the work (typically one to two weeks after a term's end), and will identify any late work penalties, as appropriate. By the end of the incomplete period, the teacher will confirm the student's numeric grade. Consultation with a curriculum/instructional coordinator is available as needed.

The VHS Learning Dean or Associate Deans settle disputes if the teacher and site coordinator disagree about whether a student should be given an Incomplete. Site coordinators can request a review by submitting a [support request](#).

The additional time allotted for the completion of incomplete work may not exceed two weeks from the close of the marking period. See the Handbook policy entitled Extension Requests for additional details.

## Late Enrollments or Enrollments During the Add Period

The VHS Learning add period extends into the first week of each semester. Students who are enrolled in a VHS Learning course during the add period will not be penalized for submitting work late during Weeks 1 and 2. VHS Learning will extend this period of allowed work submission as needed, based on the circumstance of the enrollment or the curriculum of the course.

In a limited number of circumstances, VHS Learning allows enrollments after the add period is complete. These exceptions are granted on a case-by-case basis, approved by VHS Learning administration. Students are provided an entry plan if they enter courses after Week 3.



## Late Work

The following late work policy applies to work submitted in paced courses without an excusable reason for absence, as defined in the Excusable Reasons for Absence policy. If a student has an excusable reason for absence that requires additional flexibility, the student or site coordinator must communicate with the teacher to establish a schedule for turning in work late (without penalty) and identify whether modification of expectations/ assignments is required. Students should communicate with their teacher via a PT message; site coordinators should submit a support request or communicate with the teacher via email.

- Non-collaborative work will be accepted up to one week past the due date with a penalty of 20%.
- Collaborative work, such as discussion and group work assignments will not be accepted late unless confirmed circumstances make participation impossible during the scheduled week. Confirmation from the site coordinator is required for this allowance.
- Due to grade deadlines, the late work period for the final week of the semester is shortened from one week to three days. If a student requires more than three days past the end of week 15 or week 33, they must request this from their teacher in advance of the last day of the week. See the Incomplete and Extension Request policies for additional details.

Students who enter a course during the add period are subject to the Late Enrollments policy, noted above. Review the Excusable Reason for Absence, Extended Absence, Incomplete, and Extension Request policies for additional guidance. VHS Learning staff members facilitate this process and settle disputes as needed.

## Plagiarism/Academic Honesty

Teachers will follow established communication protocols to investigate incidences, to ensure a fair, consistently applied process that treats infractions as teachable moments and provides appropriate consequences.

### Consequences

- There are circumstances where students should not be penalized, such as use of common knowledge that does not require citation, accidental submission of another student's file because it was similarly named to theirs and stored on a school computer, and the use of template prompts in their submissions.
- For a first incident, the student will receive up to 50% credit for assignment(s) that are resubmitted within 3 school days of notification.
- For second and subsequent incidents, the student will receive grades of zero and will not be allowed to resubmit assignments.
- In egregious incidents, the student may receive a zero on first offense or be withdrawn from the course with a failing grade, a decision made by the Dean or Associate Dean.
- If a student has been found to plagiarize on a quiz or exam, the student will earn a score of zero for that portion of the exam and will not be allowed to resubmit an answer to the question.
- If a student is found to have shared work but did not intend to be complicit in a plagiarism incident, that student may receive a lesser penalty, of up to 20% off the work, and would not be required to resubmit the assignment. Any future instances will be penalized using the consequences outlined above (50% credit and then no credit allowed).
- In certain courses, students must complete an alternate assignment instead of resubmission of original work. This will be determined by the curriculum/instructional coordinator and will be communicated to the teacher, who will provide instructions to the student.

## Unusual Circumstances

If questions about the incident remain unresolved, VHS Learning will investigate. Findings will be communicated to the student (via Private Topic) and the school within 2 business days, assuming students and schools respond to inquiries within 24 hours, Monday - Friday. Failure of a school to respond to inquiries within 48 hours, Monday through Friday, will result in VHS Learning resolving the matter and implementing consequences.

## Appeal

Students may appeal a decision by speaking with their site coordinator and submitting a [support request](#) so that a VHS Learning Associate Dean can investigate. Findings of the Associate Dean are final.

## Deferring to Local Policy

If a school has a more stringent policy the school policy will override VHS Learning consequences outlined above, at the request of the school.

## Plagiarism/Academic Honesty: Artificial Intelligence (AI) Tools

VHS Learning recognizes that technologies powered by artificial intelligence (AI) have been in use in classrooms for many years and have benefits to students and teachers that can facilitate learning. We believe it is our responsibility to foster an understanding of ethical and appropriate use of AI tools in a VHS Learning class. The following guidelines apply in all VHS Learning classes:

- Students under age 18 must obtain parental permission before creating an account to use AI tools, if needed.
- There are occasions where AI tools may be used in research or brainstorming. However, all work submitted for a grade in a VHS Learning course must be the students' own work.
- Students are not allowed to use AI to brainstorm or research answers on quizzes, tests, summative activities, or activities specified by their teacher or identified within their course.
- If a student chooses to use an AI tool to brainstorm or research in completion of other activities, they must cite the use of a tool and abide by the following:
  - Recognize limitations to AI chatbot tools and validate any information gathered from these tools, using other resources to support claims or gather recent information.
  - Cite AI-generated text that is included in final submissions of work. Both APA and MLA style-guides include suggestions for citing AI-generated text.
  - Share a screenshot of the original AI text to illustrate how the student used the tool and clarify what was generated by the student.

Students are encouraged to contact their teacher before submitting work if they have a question about the use of an AI tool to research or brainstorm for an assignment.

VHS Learning will use AI detection tools to identify work that has a high likelihood of being generated by AI tools. Teachers will also use their professional judgment of student work and their knowledge of their students to identify work that is likely to be created using AI tools. Work generated by AI tools will be considered plagiarism and addressed according to the VHS Learning Plagiarism/Academic Honesty policy.

## Plagiarism/Academic Honesty: Online Translation Tools

An online translator refers to any software application or device that translates from one language to another. Due to advances in translation software and translation engines (i.e., Google Translate), it has become easier for everyone to access translation technology. Online translators are detrimental to language acquisition. Students who use online translators do not learn the vocabulary and grammar necessary to develop reading, writing, speaking, and conversational skills.

Although translation technology has progressed, word-for-word translation of phrases, sentences, or paragraphs using an online translator is often slightly, or significantly, incorrect. When using online translators, students often include words, phrases, and sentences that are not part of their learned vocabulary, which results in fluency levels above a student's proficiency level. VHS Learning teachers use these clues to identify work that has been created using an online translator.

Use of online translators in place of completing the necessary language learning activities on one's own is not acceptable and is considered plagiarism. Refer to the Plagiarism/Academic Honesty policy for more information.

## Proctored Exams

Many courses require a proctor to be available to supervise a final exam. A student's site coordinator, parent/guardian, or trusted adult can be a proctor. Some schools require the site coordinator to proctor exams; students should be sure they understand local requirements before taking their final exam.

- Students complete the [Proctor Identification Form](#) before the proctored exam. This form confirms the student has secured a proctor; both the student and their proctor sign the form.
- Once the Proctor Identification Form is submitted to the appropriate Dropbox, the student can see and begin their final exam at the appropriate time.
- The student completes the final exam in the presence of their proctor and the proctor completes the [Exam Verification Form](#).
- The student submits the Exam Verification Form to the appropriate Dropbox in their VHS Learning class. Failure to submit the Exam Verification Form will result in a grade of zero on the final exam.

Final exams are designed to be completed in approximately 45 minutes. Proctors should monitor the time spent completing the exam, to ensure students are within this guideline. Students who have submitted an [Accommodation Form](#) with an extended time accommodation will receive extended time on the final exam.

## Resubmission of Work

Unless required by a student's IEP or 504 plan, or a submission in a format that the teacher cannot open, VHS Learning students are not allowed to resubmit graded work for an improved score. Students should contact their teacher prior to submitting work if they have questions about expectations for an assignment. Teachers have discretion to allow resubmission of an assignment on a case-by-case basis or if the entire class struggled to successfully complete an activity. Teachers should discuss whole-class resubmission with their curriculum or instructional coordinator prior to offering this to the class, to ensure equity across course sections.

## Special Education: Students with Accommodations

Students who participate in VHS Learning classes through their school remain the responsibility of their school regarding educational accommodations; however, online teachers are required to provide reasonable accommodations as outlined in the student's plan, such as extended time to complete assignments, reduced workload, or modified expectations for discussion participation. This [Accommodations Overview](#) describes how VHS Learning provides typical accommodations.

We strongly recommend that the site coordinator is involved in decisions regarding VHS Learning course enrollments for students with an IEP or 504 plan. Site coordinators have received training on VHS Learning policies and understand program expectations. By placing a student in a VHS Learning class, the student's school agrees to complete the [Accommodation Form](#) and provide information about IEP or 504 accommodations. When enrolling a student with an IEP or 504 plan, the school must:

- Complete and upload an [Accommodation Form](#) for the student. Do **not** upload actual IEP or 504 documents to the Student Information System.
- Delete any previous IEP, 504, or other educational plan documents from the Student Information System.
- Change the IEP/504 field to YES in the Student Information System.
- Notify the student's teacher as soon as the document is uploaded to the Student Information System. Upload and notification should occur as early in the course as possible.
- Provide equipment or physical accommodations that might be needed, such as a special keyboard, special software, additional face-to-face support, an on-site tutor, or an interpreter.

## Synchronous Communication

VHS Learning teachers are required to host synchronous (live) office hour sessions to connect with students and provide support. Teachers are strongly encouraged to offer a "meet and greet" session within the first week or two of class. In lieu of office-hour sessions, teachers can run a tutorial session on a topic, though creation of lecture material is not required.

### General Guidelines

- Participation in synchronous sessions cannot be a requirement of the course unless the requirement is noted in the course catalog.
- Extra credit is provided for participation in synchronous sessions only in limited cases, as part of special programs or grants.
- As noted in more detail below, all sessions will be recorded, though recordings of sessions where just one student attends will not be shared with the class.
- Teachers are expected to read a statement at the beginning of each session to inform students of their rights to turn off their webcam prior to recording the session.
- Synchronous sessions are not a venue for parents to discuss student information or concerns with the teacher. If a parent wishes to communicate with their student's teacher, they should request a meeting through the student's site coordinator and a member of the VHS Learning team will meet with the parent or facilitate a meeting between the parent and teacher.

## Frequency

- AP Teachers are required to host at least one synchronous session every two weeks, though teachers are encouraged to host sessions weekly.
- Non-AP teachers are required to host at least one session per month, though teachers are encouraged to host sessions once every two weeks.
- Self-Paced teachers are required to offer one help session each week and 15-minute check-in sessions monthly, as outlined in the Instructional Responsibilities for Self-Paced Teachers policy.
- Teachers are asked to rotate their schedule, so all students have an opportunity to participate.
- If a student requests a synchronous meeting for extra help or clarifying misunderstandings, the teacher is asked to make every effort to offer a time that is available to both the teacher and student. Unless the request is personal, the teacher is encouraged to offer the session to the class as a help session related to a specific topic.

## Set-up and Technical Settings

- Technical instructions, privacy statement, and recommended settings for synchronous sessions are included in the VHS Learning Knowledge article for [Virtual Classroom](#).
- Teachers must use the Virtual Classroom tool available in our learning management system.
- All sessions should be recorded for safety and reference purposes, but teachers should not set the sessions to publish recordings automatically to the class.
- At the conclusion of a group session, the teacher may choose to share the recording link for the class to view as a reference. Recordings are available for the academic year.
- If negative or concerning behavior or conversation occurs during a session, the teacher should immediately submit a support request so that VHS Learning can review the session recording.
- Prior to beginning the recording, teachers should read the VHS Learning statement that informs students the session is being recorded and that their participation in the session indicates their willingness to be in a recording that will be shared with the class. Students who wish to listen but not be seen are given an opportunity to mute their microphone and shut off their webcam.
- Students who attend a live session will appear by their full name, whether they are sharing their microphone and webcam. Students who do not wish to have their name listed in the attendance list should watch the recording instead of attending a live session.
- If a session is attended by only one student, the teacher will still record the session as noted but should not share the session with the class.
- Session links should be labeled with a descriptive title and the date for future reference.

## Transcripts

Students who complete courses are provided VHS Learning transcripts after final grades have been released. Transcripts are produced only for students who have completed courses in full. Partial credit transcripts are not produced; students who do not complete an entire course will be able to share their grades with their local school to determine if partial credit is possible locally, based on the percentage of the course completed.

In the unusual circumstance that a student is allowed to enter a VHS Learning course after the add period, the VHS Learning Dean or Associate Dean will review the student's previous course enrollment and grades to determine if previous coursework will be incorporated into the VHS Learning grade. At minimum, the student must have been enrolled in the same course prior to their VHS Learning enrollment and must complete at least 50% of the VHS Learning course to earn a VHS Learning credit.

Transcripts are made available to custom course offerings if the course is taught in its entirety by a VHS Learning teacher. Schools using VHS Learning content taught by local teachers are responsible for providing transcripts using their local system and policies.

## Code of Conduct/General Responsibilities

### Acceptable Internet Use Policy

The VHS Learning website and systems shall be used in a manner consistent with the purpose of the organization, the administrative rules for using the system, and handbook policies. Communications using system resources will be considered publications and will be governed by administrative policies and policies regarding publications.

Users are expected to conduct themselves in a responsible, ethical, and polite manner. Staff and students understand that some material that can be accessed on the Internet may be inaccurate and that some resources may contain material that is deemed contrary to prevailing community standards or inappropriate for classroom use. If such inappropriate material is inadvertently encountered, it shall be the user's responsibility to disengage immediately.

**Responsibilities:** Access to systems is a privilege extended to staff, students, and other users for the purpose stated above. Users are responsible for respecting and protecting other users' rights in the community and on the Internet. Users are expected to act in a responsible, ethical, and legal manner, in accordance with stated policies, in conformance with the purposes of the other sites, and in compliance with state and national laws. A user who commits a violation may have his/her access privileges revoked, as well as whatever other disciplinary action may be assigned by both local and VHS Learning administrators.

**Usage Guidelines:** All use of our systems will be consistent with the purpose as stated above. This policy does not attempt to describe all required behaviors by users of the system. In any specific situation, we rely upon individual judgment of appropriate conduct. To assist in such judgment, the following guidelines are offered:

- Any use for illegal purposes, or in support of illegal activities, is prohibited.
- Any use for political, religious, or commercial purposes is prohibited.
- The use of email in any manner that is contrary to stated policy is prohibited.
- Any use that disrupts the educational and administrative goals of VHS Learning is prohibited.
- Any use of our systems or accounts by anyone but the authorized owner of the account is prohibited. Sharing account credentials is prohibited.
- Any reproduction of copyrighted material without explicit permission is prohibited.

**Privacy:** System storage areas may be inspected at any time. System administrators or other appropriate staff may review communications to maintain integrity system-wide and ensure users are using the system in a responsible manner.

**Illegal Copying:** Users should neither download nor install any commercial software, shareware, or freeware onto network drives or disks, unless they have written permission from the System Administrator or other appropriate staff; nor should they copy other people's work or intrude into other people's files.

**Inappropriate Language:** No profane, abusive, impolite, or inappropriate language should be used to communicate within our systems and/or on the Internet.

**Inappropriate Materials:** Access or upload of material deemed inappropriate for educational use is prohibited. Should users encounter such material by accident, they should disengage. Students should report such encounters to their teacher immediately. In addition, creating and/or uploading any material that is inappropriate for educational use (text, video, images or other) is prohibited.

## **Anti-Harassment / Cyber-Bullying Policy**

We are committed to safeguarding the right of all individuals to work and learn in an environment that is free of harassment. Compliance with anti-harassment will be the responsibility of each school according to its anti-harassment policy and procedures. Complaints should be filed with the complainant's school and follow procedures of the policy for that school. In cases where there is no anti-harassment policy in place the VHS Learning anti-harassment policy will apply. Students are encouraged to report any incident of harassment/bullying to their teacher and site coordinator. Teachers and site coordinators witnessing cyber-bullying within their course and/or notified of harassment/bullying issues are required to submit a support request to notify VHS Learning administrators within 24 hours.

### **Anti-Harassment Policy**

Harassment, intimidation or bullying and acts of cyber-bullying for any reason, including but not limited to race, color, ancestry, religion, national origin, age, sex, sexual orientation, or disability in any form, is strictly prohibited. Anyone whose behavior is found to be in violation of this policy will be subject to discipline, up to and including expulsion. Violators may also be referred to law enforcement officials.

### **Definition**

"Cyber-bullying" is the use of electronic information and communication devices, to include but not be limited to, email messages, instant messaging, text messaging, cellular telephone communications, internet blogs, internet chat rooms, internet postings, and defamatory websites, that:

1. Deliberately threatens, harasses, intimidates an individual or group of individuals; or
2. Places an individual in reasonable fear of harm to the individual or damage to the individual's property; or
3. Has the effect of disrupting the orderly operation of the course.

## **Copyright Policy**

According to the U.S. Copyright Act, all works that are in a fixed form are copyrighted works, whether they bear any copyright markings. As such, before using copyrighted materials in any course materials, personnel shall either (a) acquire the rights to use the materials from the copyright owners, (b) keep a written (signed and dated) record that the materials fall within the fair use provisions of the Copyright Act or fall within the requirements of the TEACH Act, or (c) determine that the works are in the public domain. Individuals using copyrighted materials without completing either step A, B or C do so at their own individual risk.

## **Data Security and Retention Policy**

### **Cybersecurity Framework and Risk Assessment**

VHS Learning uses a custom cybersecurity framework based on industry standards provided by a third-party contractor. Our systems are audited periodically with a third-party contractor for compliance and security improvements.

### **Employee Training**

All VHS Learning employees must pass a criminal background check and be fingerprinted. Employees are required to complete ongoing training in best practices for information security, data protection and privacy regulations.



## Backups

VHS Learning systems are cloud-based and backed up daily in accordance with industry standards and disaster recovery protocols.

## Destruction of Data

VHS Learning Data Retention timeframes are in accordance with the Commonwealth of Massachusetts records retention laws and have been approved by our accrediting bodies. Partners with differing needs may amend their individual contract upon mutual agreement with VHS, Inc. Individual student records may be deleted upon request by the parent or eligible student, per FERPA guidelines.

Data cannot be recovered after destruction. VHS Learning Data Retention is as follows:

- Course transcripts will be retained indefinitely.
- Student data, including assignment grades, will be retained for 5 years.
- Student assignment submissions and activity, communication, and teacher feedback will be retained for 5 years.

All questions or concerns regarding our Privacy or Data Retention policies should be directed to your Partnership manager or our Privacy Officer at [privacy@vhslearning.org](mailto:privacy@vhslearning.org).

## Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging

At VHS Learning, everyone matters.

We value differences, take pride in creating safe and inclusive spaces where students belong and thrive, and are committed to ensuring our educational services represent and serve the students and schools that will use them. We believe embracing and nurturing diverse perspectives improves learning and creates an environment where all people are respected. Representation matters: a diverse, equitable, and inclusive organization better represents our global online learning community. We strive to meet these goals for students, educators, and VHS Learning team members, now and in the future.

We seek to create a diverse, inclusive, and equitable environment where all staff, faculty, and volunteers, whatever their gender, race, ethnicity, national origin, age, sexual orientation or identity, education, or ability, feel valued and respected.

We respect and value diverse life experiences and heritages and strive to ensure that all voices are valued and heard. We are committed to modeling diversity and inclusion for the online education industry and the nonprofit sector, and to maintaining an inclusive environment with equitable treatment for all. VHS Learning strives to:

- See diversity, inclusion, and equity as connected to our mission and critical to ensuring the well-being of our staff and the communities we serve.
- Acknowledge and dismantle inequities within our policies, systems, programs, and services.
- Explore potential underlying, unquestioned assumptions that interfere with inclusiveness.
- Think about how systemic inequities impact our organization's work, and how best to address that in a way that is consistent with our mission.
- Practice and encourage transparent communication in all interactions.
- Commit time and resources to expand more diverse leadership within our Board, and staff.
- Lead with respect and tolerance. We expect all our team members to embrace this notion and to express it in workplace interactions and through everyday practices.



## Feedback on Course Content or Experiences

As an organization that provides quality learning experiences and is committed to continuous improvement, we value feedback from all stakeholders (students, teachers, site coordinators, school administrators). Feedback is solicited from stakeholders through the annual survey process. Anyone with a concern that needs attention during the academic year is encouraged to submit a support request to the VHS Learning [Service Center](#), so the information can be routed to the appropriate staff member for investigation and follow up.

## FERPA Statement

The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) is a federal law enacted in 1974 that guarantees the confidentiality of a student's records. VHS, Inc. adheres to FERPA policies and regulations.

If you or your child were enrolled in VHS, Inc. directly by your local school or district, VHS, Inc. may be considered a school official, contractor, operator, or consultant of your child's school. In these cases, your local school may designate an authorized representative to contact for FERPA or privacy questions, records inspection requests or directory information opt-out requests. In these cases, please contact the designated representative for your local school directly. For students enrolled in VHS, Inc. courses through a private school, FERPA may not apply if the private school does not receive federal funding.

The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) affords parents and students who are 18 years of age or older ("eligible students") certain rights with respect to the student's education records. These rights are:

- The right to inspect and review the student's education records within 45 days after the day VHS, Inc. receives a request for access.

Parents or eligible students who wish to inspect their child's or their education records should submit to the Chief Privacy Officer ([privacy@vhslearning.org](mailto:privacy@vhslearning.org)) a written request that identifies the records they wish to inspect. The school official will arrange for access and notify the parent or eligible student of the time and place where the records may be inspected.

- The right to request the amendment of the student's education records that the parent or eligible student believes are inaccurate, misleading, or otherwise in violation of the student's privacy rights under FERPA.

Parents or eligible students who wish to ask VHS, Inc. to amend their child's or their education record should contact the Chief Privacy Officer ([privacy@vhslearning.org](mailto:privacy@vhslearning.org)), clearly identify the part of the record they want changed and specify why it should be changed. If the school decides not to amend the record as requested by the parent or eligible student, the school will notify the parent or eligible student of the decision and of their right to a hearing regarding the request for amendment. Additional information regarding the hearing procedures will be provided to the parent or eligible student when notified of the right to a hearing.

- The right to provide written consent before the school discloses personally identifiable information (PII) from the student's education records, except to the extent that FERPA authorizes disclosure without consent.

One exception, which permits disclosure without consent, is disclosure to school officials with legitimate educational interests. The criteria for determining who constitutes a school official and

what constitutes a legitimate educational interest must be set forth in the school's or school district's annual notification for FERPA rights. A school official typically includes a person employed by the school or school district as an administrator, supervisor, instructor, or support staff member (including health or medical staff and law enforcement unit personnel) or a person serving on the school board. A school official also may include a volunteer, contractor, or consultant who, while not employed by the school, performs an institutional service or function for which the school would otherwise use its own employees and who is under the direct control of the school with respect to the use and maintenance of PII from education records, such as an attorney, auditor, medical consultant, or therapist; a parent or student volunteering to serve on an official committee, such as a disciplinary or grievance committee; or a parent, student, or other volunteer assisting another school official in performing his or her tasks. A school official typically has a legitimate educational interest if the official needs to review an education record to fulfill his or her professional responsibility.

Upon request, the school discloses education records without consent to officials of another school or school district in which a student seeks or intends to enroll or is already enrolled if the disclosure is for purposes of the student's enrollment or transfer. NOTE: FERPA requires a school or school district to make a reasonable attempt to notify the parent or student of the records request unless it states in its annual notification that it intends to forward records on request, or the disclosure is initiated by the parent or eligible student.

- The right to file a complaint with the U.S. Department of Education concerning alleged failures by VHS, Inc. to comply with the requirements of FERPA. The name and address of the Office that administers FERPA are:

Student Privacy Policy Office  
U.S. Department of Education  
400 Maryland Avenue, SW  
Washington, DC 20202

## Guest Policy

Guests are not typically allowed into VHS Learning courses. To request guest access, please submit a support request through the VHS Learning [Service Center](#).

## Instructional Materials: Mature Content

If a course uses instructional materials that contain mature content or themes (such as mature themes in literature, graphic/violent content, or R-rated film clips), it is noted in the prerequisite or additional information fields in the course description found in the [course catalog](#). Schools should obtain appropriate permission for enrollment, based on local policies.

## Mandated Reporting of Suspected Cases of Abuse/Neglect

Under the Federal Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA) all 50 states have passed laws mandating the reporting of suspected child abuse and/or neglect. Teachers are mandated reporters; if they have reason to believe that a student may be a victim of abuse or neglect, they must immediately report concerns and the reason for those concerns.

VHS Learning abides by guidance distributed to MA private schools and adheres to responsibilities outlined in Massachusetts General Laws c. 119, Section 51A. This specifies that the duty to report is

triggered when a mandated reporter, in their professional capacity, has reasonable cause to believe that a child under the age of eighteen years is suffering physical or emotional injury resulting from: 1.) abuse, which causes harm or substantial risk of harm to the child's health or welfare, including sexual abuse; 2.) neglect, including malnutrition; 3.) physical dependence upon an addictive drug at birth; 4.) being a sexually exploited child; or 5.) being a human trafficking victim as defined by section 20M of chapter 233.

VHS Learning has established the Dean, Associate Deans, and President/CEO as designated agents for purposes of reporting cases of abuse/neglect to the Massachusetts Department of Children and Families (DCF). According to Massachusetts General Laws, an oral report must be made immediately to DCF, and a written follow-up must be made within 48 hours of initial notification.

The following protocol should be followed when reporting suspected abuse/neglect:

- If abuse or neglect is suspected, the teacher must immediately contact their curriculum or instructional coordinator to confirm/validate the nature of the concern. If the teacher is unable to reach their curriculum or instructional coordinator, they should call the VHS Learning Dean (978-450-0414) or Associate Dean of Instruction (978-450-0423).
- VHS Learning will call the student's school administration to share the concern, ask for relevant contextual information, and determine whether VHS Learning or the local school will contact DCF regarding the issue. If VHS Learning is not able to communicate with school officials within an hour of initial contact, they will connect with the appropriate local DCF office.
- If needed, VHS Learning staff will use the off-hour reporting line for Massachusetts students (before 9 AM or after 5 PM on weekdays, or on weekends/holidays). These reports, if needed, will be made to the Massachusetts Child Abuse Emergency Line (1-800-792-5200).

As noted above, cases of abuse or neglect must be reported immediately, so timeliness of reporting to VHS Learning is critical. Teacher communications will be included as part of the filing, along with the teacher contact information, in case of follow-up.

VHS Learning will guide whether/how to follow up with the student in the class environment. In some cases, the local school will take responsibility for notifying the student of the report so that appropriate counseling can be provided.

## **Reporting all Other Concerns for Student Safety/Wellness**

- When student comments or behaviors in class raise concern, the teacher will immediately respond to the student with appropriate concern. This response can be posted in the student's Private Topic or, depending on the gravity of the situation, via a phone call to the student.
- Teachers must report concerns about student posts or behaviors to the site coordinator and to their curriculum/instructional coordinator immediately. The email must include specific details of the concern as well as the steps that have been taken to reach out to the student. The email must also request a response from the school, so that we can ensure an adult in the student's location has received the email and is aware of the situation.
- If a student shares an explicit threat to harm themselves or others, the teacher must immediately phone an administrator at the student's local school so they can find the student and enact their crisis plan. Outside of school hours, the teacher must contact local authorities to

request a wellness check, describing that their online student expressed explicit suicidal thoughts and they are concerned for their safety.

- If a student is identified as potentially suicidal, it is imperative that they are seen by their school's mental health professional. The teacher must contact the student's site coordinator and request a response within an hour. If the school does not respond, the teacher should contact the VHS Learning Dean (978-450-0414) or the Associate Dean of Instruction (978-450-0423). Outside of school hours the teacher can request a wellness check, as described above, based on the type of statement made and the timing of when the teacher receives the message.

If a teacher is concerned about a student's health, wellness, or behavior, they should contact their curriculum/instructional coordinator to discuss the situation and next steps, which will involve emailing the site coordinator or school counselor depending on the circumstance.

## **Nondiscrimination: Title VI/IX and Other Equity Legislation**

Participating schools must comply with all Federal Civil Rights legislation. Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 protects individuals from discrimination based on race, color, or national origin in programs or activities that receive federal financial assistance. Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 ensures that no person shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination in any federally assisted program. In addition, state civil rights legislation also applies to online courses. Compliance with all civil rights legislation will be the responsibility of each school, and complaints should be filed with the local school and should follow the school's grievance procedure.

## **Parent/Guardian Communication with VHS Learning Teacher**

The primary point of contact between a VHS Learning teacher and a parent/guardian is the student's site coordinator. This structure ensures local policies are honored and student support is in place at the local site.

If a parent wishes to communicate with a teacher, they should request a meeting through the site coordinator. A member of the VHS Learning Curriculum and Instruction Team will meet with the parent and site coordinator to gather information. The teacher will be included, when necessary, based on the teacher's availability.

If a parent/guardian contacts a teacher to set up a meeting, the teacher should share the request with their VHS Learning curriculum/instructional coordinator, to determine next steps.

## **Privacy Policy**

Please visit <http://vhslearning.org/privacy-policy> to view the most current Privacy Statement.

## **Privacy: Consideration for Email Communication**

To protect student privacy, teachers and site coordinators are asked to adhere to the following communication guidelines:

- Do not use full student names in email subject lines, use initials only.
- Do not email or upload IEP or 504 plans. Upload the [Accommodation Form](#) to the VHS Learning student information system.
- Be mindful of the distribution list for email communications regarding student performance or any student issues. Use secure email sending systems as appropriate.

- Initial emails should only be sent to contacts affiliated with the student in the student information system, unless the school has added personnel or a parent/guardian to support the student.

## **Social Media Platforms**

Although VHS Learning students may connect with each other outside of their classes, using social media to make and maintain connections, students are discouraged from creating groups in social media for the purpose of completing assignments for their VHS Learning class. Discussions and group work must be completed within the VHS Learning platforms to ensure teacher visibility and equitable grading.

## **VHS, Inc. Intellectual Property**

All course content and assets that are VHS intellectual property remain the property of VHS, Inc. and shall be used only for the education of students as outlined in VHS, Inc. participation agreements. Copies will not be made, and content will not be distributed unless authorized in writing by VHS, Inc.

## **Participation Requirements**

### **Faculty Advisor Responsibilities**

Faculty advisors are experienced teachers and staff who provide advice and mentoring. All first-semester teachers and veteran teachers requiring additional support are assigned a faculty advisor. Faculty advisors evaluate instruction according to responsibilities outlined in the Faculty Advising Handbook.

We are committed to providing high-quality courses and faculty advisor feedback is critical to this process. Advisors should be candid in their assessment of teacher practice. All questions or concerns regarding faculty advising should be directed to the Associate Dean of Instruction.

### **Professional Development**

All teachers complete the professional development course Online Teaching Methodologies (OTM), a graduate-level course that focuses on pedagogical and select technical skills necessary for successful online instruction. Participants may purchase graduate credit for completion of their OTM professional development course. Information on taking OTM for graduate credit is provided during the OTM course.

In addition to OTM, teachers complete self-paced trainings: Foundations Training and Implementing Accommodations Training. Both trainings are found in the Teacher Resource Area and must be completed prior to the start of the first semester of teaching. Teachers remain enrolled in the Teacher Resource Area throughout their time as a VHS Learning teacher, so they always have access to review this training as needed.

Experienced teachers can hone their practice through micro-credential opportunities. Micro-credentials focus on a discrete area of instruction and provide opportunities for seasoned teachers to demonstrate mastery through submission of evidence to Curriculum and Instruction staff who will evaluate, provide feedback, and award micro-credentials.

Site coordinators receive training where they learn best practices to recruit, enroll, mentor, and monitor their online students as well as administer the online program at their school. This professional development, which is self-paced, gives site coordinators the administrative and technical skills necessary to be effective in their role as school liaison. The Site Coordinator Orientation (SCO) and Resource Area is also available on an ongoing basis for reference by site coordinators. The VHS Learning

team hosts webinars for site coordinators and is available should site coordinators need additional support or have questions on program implementation at their school.

## **School Requirements for Participation**

### **Full Participation with a VHS Learning Teacher**

Schools that provide a teacher to instruct a VHS Learning course agree to release the teacher from one period of local teaching duties (0.2 full-time equivalent). These schools will receive a discounted enrollment fee.

All schools must designate a local site coordinator. The site coordinator is responsible for coordinating the VHS Learning online program at their school and is the primary contact for the school. It is recommended that the site coordinator be freed from other responsibilities for one period per day (to a maximum of 0.2 FTE). A site coordinator can be a school counselor, teacher, administrator, or paraprofessional. Multiple site coordinators can be assigned so that duties can be shared. Multiple site coordinators at the same school will receive training at no additional charge. Site coordinators must understand and adhere to any local requirements regarding online course enrollment within their own school districts/states.

### **Student-Only Participation**

A school with student-only participation does not provide a local teacher to teach a VHS Learning course and uses only a site coordinator for program participation. Schools with student-only participation also designate a local site coordinator, as described in the section above.

Further details on participation options are available on our website or by speaking to a VHS Learning team member.

## **Site Coordinator Responsibilities**

The site coordinator is the primary contact between students, schools, and VHS Learning. Site coordinator responsibilities include:

- sharing information about VHS Learning program requirements and student expectations with students and families,
- recruiting students who are a good fit for the program,
- registering students into VHS Learning online courses,
- monitoring student progress,
- collecting and reporting progress reports,
- communicating student needs and verifying absences,
- reporting final grades, and
- sharing general information about the program with local administrators, school counselors, students, and families.

The site coordinator ensures grade and progress reports for participating students are submitted for administrative purposes within the students' local school. Site coordinators track student progress in courses, review student progress within our student information system (SIS), and act quickly to resolve any issues. Site coordinators meet regularly with all students to troubleshoot operational problems and discuss progress. Site coordinators also serve as parent liaisons for students taking online courses.

Site coordinators work with VHS Learning teachers when students need additional support or have an extended illness or circumstance that interferes with their participation in a course. Site coordinators manage attendance procedures, student access, and enrollment in courses.

The site coordinator keeps VHS Learning informed about progress and problems on a timely basis and ensures communications reach the appropriate school personnel. VHS Learning must be notified as soon as possible via the [Service Center](#) if there is a change of site coordinator.

## **Student Licensing**

Software licenses are protected under copyright laws. The VHS Learning team obtains appropriate licenses for software prior to use.

## **Student Participation**

VHS Learning students are expected to attend and participate in their courses as fully as they would attend and participate in a face-to-face course. All assigned work should be completed by due dates and students must actively participate in course discussions. At an absolute minimum, students are required to log-in and perform work in their paced online courses three times per week. Ideally, students will access their VHS Learning classes each weekday.

In cases of extended student absence (seven or more consecutive days), the student, student's site coordinator, or the student's parent/guardian, must contact VHS Learning for assistance in coordinating make up work. It is the student's responsibility to make up work missed due to absence. VHS Learning Extended Absence and Late Work policies guide practice for scheduling make up work and allowing credit. It is the responsibility of each student to be familiar with late work policies and attendance policies and to adhere to these policies.

Students who do not participate in their paced course for 14 calendar days will be considered truant/non-participatory and may be dropped from the course at the discretion of VHS Learning. Please see the Truancy/Student Non-Participation policy in this handbook for additional details. Participation expectations for Self-Paced and Credit Recovery programs can be found in those sections of the handbook.

## **Teacher Responsibilities/VHS Learning Standards for Teaching**

Teachers create safe and vibrant learning communities within our classrooms. Teachers are expected to meet the VHS Learning Standards for Teaching, which address the professional responsibilities required of VHS Learning teachers and critical skills needed to be a successful online teacher.

Teachers who do not meet the VHS Learning Standards for Teaching will be subject to sanctions (see the Teacher Sanctions policy). Teachers must maintain content area certification and background checks as required by their local department of education. At minimum, teachers must have a fingerprinted background check every 5 years. Background check costs are not reimbursed by VHS Learning.

### **General**

- Participate in VHS Learning courses as fully as they would participate in traditional courses.
- Login at least once a day, Monday through Friday.
- Host office hours in accordance with the VHS Learning Synchronous Tools policy.
- Accommodate students as needed, based on Accommodations Forms.
- Support students who are struggling, providing make-up plans as needed.
- Apply all VHS Learning policies consistently and equitably.



## Discussions

- Read and monitor student posts in course discussions throughout the week.
- Be present in course discussions and add at least one post that deepens the discussion and helps students develop critical thinking skills.
- Respond to questions posted by students in their Private Topic (PT) and in any questions area within 24 hours, Monday through Friday.

## Grading and Feedback

- Grade all assignments within one week of the assignment due date.
- Confirm student grades and enter comments according to the VHS Learning calendar.
- Provide substantive, instructive feedback on one or more key assignments each week.
- Positive feedback should be more comprehensive than “Excellent work!” and should include specifics that show the student the teacher is attentive to their work.
- Substantive feedback includes specific references to improvements that could be made and references to lessons in the week where students can review missed concepts, as applicable.
- Grade assignments based on quality and comprehensiveness, using rubrics when provided.

## News Items

- Post a comprehensive news item at the start of each week, bridging ideas from the previous week and introducing major themes and topics of the week.
- Use a positive tone in all news items.
- Post at least one additional news item throughout the week.
- Personalize template news items found in their course, so they reflect their own voice.

## Communication

- Respond to communications from students, site coordinators, and VHS Learning within 24 hours, Monday through Friday.
- Use asset-based and unambiguous language in communication with all stakeholders.
- Send an introductory email to site coordinators during the first week of the course or as soon as a new student is added, if after Week 1.
- Communicate with the site coordinator as soon as there is concern about student performance and/or attendance. If a student does not login for more than three days without advance notice, teachers are expected to reach out to site coordinators.
- Copy a curriculum or instructional coordinator on all communication with site coordinators, families, and schools.
- Implement the Truancy/Student Non-Participation policy if a student does not participate for 14 calendar days without a valid reason from their site coordinator (or without having proactively notified the teacher).

## Absences

- Notify their curriculum or instructional coordinator via the [Service Center](#) if an illness or emergency prevents them from teaching their course.
- For three consecutive school days or less, VHS Learning will monitor the course section.
- For four consecutive school days or more, the teacher should alert their students via a news item. As needed, VHS Learning will work with the school district to place a



substitute/replacement teacher within the course. The teacher's school district will be subject to a substitute teacher fee.

- VHS Learning courses do not include scheduled breaks as it would be impossible to identify one break period that accommodates all schools. Teachers should plan to access their course during times when their school calendar differs from the VHS Learning calendar.
- If the VHS Learning office is closed, teachers are not expected to login to their class, though they are encouraged to do so, if possible. If a teacher will be absent for more than one day during a VHS Learning office closure (for example, over the Thanksgiving holiday), they should post a news item for their students.

### Course Revisions

- Preview course activities and materials prior to students' accessing the week's lessons, to re-familiarize themselves with lesson content and check for broken links or other potential issues.
- Recommend updates, fixes, replacements for broken links, and/or improvements to courses via the [Service Center](#).
- To allow for adequate time to complete modifications, course modification requests should be submitted no later than Friday before the week begins.

### Teacher Monitoring and Support

Courses are monitored to ensure teachers meet VHS Learning instructional standards. Curriculum and Instruction staff members review all courses at least once each academic year. New teachers and teachers needing extra assistance are assigned a faculty advisor (an experienced teacher or staff member) to monitor progress and provide feedback each week.

Faculty advisors complete weekly progress reports based on expectations shared with teachers in training and the Handbook. Throughout the semester, the faculty advisor provides written feedback on areas of growth and commendation. At the end of the semester, the faculty advisor completes a summative report of the teacher's progress throughout the semester. Summative reports are made available to the teacher for review and are shared with local school administrators if concerns are noted.

If teacher quality does not meet standards, faculty sanctions may be necessary. Teachers who fail to meet standards and do not show significant improvement in subsequent semesters are subject to disciplinary action (in accordance with the Faculty Sanctions policy outlined in the Handbook) at the discretion of VHS Learning. VHS Learning reserves the right to terminate a course offering and/or instructor participation at any time.

### Teacher Sanctions

If a teacher is not meeting expectations, the following protocol will be utilized:

#### Initial communication of concerns

Regular and ongoing communication between the teacher and VHS Learning advisor or staff member ensure teachers understand areas where they are not meeting expectations. The Associate Dean of Instruction consults with the advisor or staff member to ensure communications are clear and include progress monitoring and support to help the teacher meet expectations.

#### Warning notice sent to teacher and school administrator

If the teacher fails to make progress resolving issues discussed with the curriculum/instructional coordinator or faculty advisor, the Associate Dean of Instruction will email the teacher with specific information about the issues that have surfaced, expectations for improvement, and a timeline for

follow-up. The teacher's local school administrator will be included in this email. This step resolves with the teacher successfully modifying instructional practice or being placed on probation.

### **Probation**

If the teacher has not resolved the issues outlined in the warning notice, they will be placed on probation. This process is also managed by the Associate Dean of Instruction and results in the teacher returning to a teaching position under the supervision of a faculty advisor or being removed from the program.

### **Extenuating Circumstances**

In some circumstances, VHS Learning will move immediately to a probationary status. Situations where students are placed in jeopardy or teachers are found to be grossly inappropriate or abusive will result in immediate probationary status or termination, at the discretion of VHS Learning.

## **Technical Requirements for Participation**

The Internet is the primary vehicle for course activities and instruction. Email is the primary tool for communication between teachers and administration. Schools considering participation in the program must have Internet connectivity; students and faculty must be able to access the Internet daily.

Students typically spend at least one full class period per day using a computer with Internet access to meet the work requirements of their online course.

Courses contain links to outside websites. Every effort is made to maintain these links so that they are up to date and safe, but it cannot be guaranteed that users following links from within a course will not encounter sites hosting malware or viruses. It is strongly recommended that all users install malware/virus protection from a reputable vendor, and that this software is updated regularly. VHS Learning does not provide users with technical support for virus/malware removal.

Technical issues may be reported via a variety of means, including phone, email, and through the [Service Center](#) (24/7 support). Support requests submitted to the [Service Center](#) will receive a response within 24 hours, Monday through Friday.

## **Self-Paced Program**

VHS Learning is pleased to offer self-paced courses for motivated students. These courses are taught by licensed VHS Learning teachers and contain nearly identical content to the paced, asynchronous version of the courses. Students progress through the course independently, working at their own pace. Self-Paced courses follow all VHS Learning policies, with some exceptions, as outlined in this section of the handbook.

## **Start and End Dates for Self-Paced Courses**

### **1 Credit Self-Paced Courses**

Self-Paced courses worth 1.0 credit (AP and non-AP) will begin each Wednesday, starting on the first Wednesday in September. Students can enroll through the first Wednesday in December for AP courses and through the first Wednesday in February for non-AP courses. Students can enroll in 0.5 credit AP classes through the second Wednesday in January. During the registration process students can select any available start date in the future. Students have until June 15 (or the Monday thereafter) to submit all assignments. Course access will be removed on June 30.

### **0.5 Credit Self-Paced Courses**

Self-Paced courses (non-AP) worth 0.5 credit will be available with start dates each Wednesday throughout the year. Students have 20 weeks from their start date to submit all assignments.

### **Add Period for Self-Paced Courses**

Because of the frequent opportunity for enrollment, there is no add period for Self-Paced courses. Students who miss a Wednesday start date will be placed into the next Wednesday start.

### **Drop Period for Self-Paced Courses**

Students have a 7-day grace period from the course start date to drop the course. The standard VHS Learning refund policy will apply.

### **Extension Requests for Self-Paced Courses**

The June 15 (or Monday thereafter) end date for 1 credit Self-Paced courses will not be extended except in the case of a student with a doctor's note excusing them from attending school for at least 2 consecutive weeks during the months of March, April, or May. Requests for additional time must be submitted to VHS Learning via support request from the site coordinator or guardian. If a student approaches a teacher about an extension, the teacher should ask the site coordinator to follow up with a support request through the VHS Learning [Service Center](#).

Students enrolled in a 0.5 credit Self-Paced course can request a one-time extension if they do not finish their work within the initial 20-week enrollment period. Students must request the extension via a support request. A VHS Learning staff member will confirm a student has completed at least 50% of the course before granting a 2-week extension.

### **Minimum Enrollment Period for Self-Paced Courses**

Students must be enrolled in a 1 credit Self-Paced course for a minimum of 20 weeks before they can earn credit for the course. Students who attempt to finish in less than 20 weeks will need to wait for the 20-week enrollment period to be complete before accessing their final grade and transcript. The minimum enrollment period for a 0.5 credit Self-Paced course is 6 weeks.

### **Pacing Expectations for Self-Paced Courses**

Although Self-Paced courses do not have deadlines to submit work, it is important that students submit work regularly so that they can finish their course within the expected timeline. Students are encouraged to login to Self-Paced courses at least 3-4 times per week to maximize success and complete the course by the course deadline.

To provide site coordinators and parents/guardians with an approximate picture of student progress, VHS Learning teachers will, approximately every 2 weeks, input grades of zero that represent suggested pacing for the course. These zeros are temporary and will be replaced with a score once the student has submitted the assignment in question.

The intent of inputting zeros is to ensure that the student, site coordinator, and parent/guardian are aware of whether the student is consistently submitting work in the class.

In addition, the teacher will email site coordinators to update them about the student's progress.

Site coordinators have access to information about Self-Paced enrollments via a dashboard in the Student Information System. Site coordinators are urged to monitor their students' overall progress relative to expected progress and share updates with parents/guardians regularly.

Students are expected to complete the course in the order the units are presented. Though students will see all course materials (except exams) after submitting the Start Here quiz, they should progress through the content in order, unless otherwise directed by their teacher or site coordinator.

It is expected that students will submit assignments consistently as they progress through the curriculum. Students should turn in assignments as they are completed; if a student turns in a large volume of assignments at once, the teacher will not be able to return feedback within 3 days and likely will not be able to provide feedback before the student moves on to new material.

### **Grade Periods for Self-Paced Courses**

All grades will be captured in a single term in the VHS Learning student information system and learning management system. Students, site coordinators, and guardians will be able to monitor grades throughout the duration of the course, however, an official grade will be issued once, no later than June 30.

If a school requires term or semester grades, it will be the school's responsibility to determine those scores based on their local policies and evaluation of student progress. We recommend that schools consider a student's consistent effort and their approximate pacing in the locally reported term grade.

### **Site Coordinator Responsibilities for Self-Paced Courses**

It is expected that site coordinators will regularly monitor progress in Self-Paced courses and will regularly review the pacing and grade information provided in the Genius dashboard for Self-Paced enrollments.

It is crucial that site coordinators communicate with families whether a student is on-track to finish by the 20-week or June 15 deadline. Site coordinators are responsible for face-to-face support and communication about self-paced enrollments as they are for all paced enrollments.

In addition to site coordinator dashboard information, students, site coordinators, and guardians (when guardian information is provided) will be sent a weekly progress update from the VHS Learning student information system. Teachers will send a monthly update to the student and site coordinator with current grade, relative progress, and approximate grade if a student does not submit any additional assignments.

## Teacher Responsibilities for Self-Paced Courses

Expectation	Self-Paced course teachers will
Log in	Log in daily Monday - Friday
Communication	Employ a positive and professional tone and incorporate communication techniques that promote clarity
	Monitor and respond to Private Topics (PTs) and question forums daily
	Send a PT to a student at least once every two weeks to connect. Send additional PTs to recap 1x1 meeting notes, acknowledge when a student completes a unit of study, and to share reminders and suggestions related to pacing
	Contact site coordinators at least once a month with a progress/pacing update; email more often when students require additional support
Virtual Classroom	Host Virtual Classroom drop-in office hours once a week
	Invite students to a 15-minute one-on-one check-in once a month
	Promote Virtual Classroom office hours and check-ins
Grades and Feedback	Input zeros approximately every 2 weeks to indicate suggested progress
	Return grades within 3 school days of student submission date whenever possible
	Provide substantive, instructive, and actionable feedback on critical assignments
	Confirm course grade (one term total) in the student information system, Genius, within one week of student completion
Additional Student Support	Preview upcoming lessons and submit a service request for broken links, typos, or other essential updates
	Implement accommodations, as appropriate
	Use varied strategies to support student understanding, including recording short video explanations or offering synchronous support
	Address issues of academic dishonesty in accordance with VHS Learning policies
	Effectively use VHS Learning technology to support instruction, troubleshooting as technical difficulties arise

## Transferring into a Self-Paced Course from a Paced Course

There are circumstances in which a transfer to a Self-Paced course from a paced course may be appropriate for a student. These guidelines outline the process for transferring to a Self-Paced course:

### Timing of transfer

Students are eligible to transfer to a Self-Paced course until January 15, though students are encouraged to speak with their site coordinator about transferring as soon as they recognize they are not able to meet the deadlines in the paced course.

### Transfer Fee

Except in the case of a student with an extreme hardship or medical issue, students will be required to pay a fee to transfer to the Self-Paced course. Site coordinators can request fee information by submitting a support request.

### Transfer of Grades and Work

If a student transfers to a Self-Paced course, a member of the VHS Learning team will transfer all grades earned in the paced version to the Self-Paced course. **Student work will not be transferred to the new course, so students should save a local copy of any work they wish to reference.**

Students must join the AP Classroom for their Self-Paced course, which could result in lost work, depending on the types of assignments submitted in the course.

Any zeros earned for missing work in the paced course will not be transferred to the Self-Paced course and students are encouraged to complete missing assignments before completing new assignments in the Self-Paced course. Students will be expected to work consistently in their Self-Paced course to complete any remaining assignments by the course end date.

## **Truancy Policy for Self-Paced Courses**

The standard VHS Learning truancy policy does not apply to Self-Paced courses. The site coordinator and guardian (if information is provided) will receive a weekly email from the VHS Learning system. This email will include the student's current grade, including zeros to replicate suggested course progress. It is expected that the site coordinator or guardian will review these emails regularly and connect with their student if they are not accessing the course.

To support continued student progress, the Self-Paced teacher will take the following actions:

- Check the course Classlist at least once per week, noting last course access date.
- If a student has not logged in for 2 weeks or longer, OR if a student has logged in but has not submitted any assignments for more than 2 weeks, the teacher will email the site coordinator and guardian with the following information:
  - The date of last course login.
  - Reminder that the student must submit work regularly to finish the class by the course end date.
  - Reminder that weekly updates are being sent from VHS Learning and a suggestion that they submit a support request if they are not receiving these emails.
  - A request for confirmation that the email has been received.
- If the student continues to be absent, the teacher should email at least once every month thereafter, until the end of the student's time in the course.

## **Credit Recovery Program**

### **Credit Recovery Course Pacing**

Students should consult with their school to ensure credit recovery courses will apply to graduation requirements. Credit recovery courses are not approved for initial eligibility with the NCAA.

Credit recovery courses are taught by licensed VHS Learning teachers and enrollment is available throughout the year, with start dates each Wednesday. Each credit recovery course must be completed within 8 weeks, though students may complete the course faster than 8 weeks. Students must remain enrolled in the credit recovery course for at least 4 weeks to earn credit for the course.

### **Credit Recovery Course Credit**

Credit recovery courses are each worth 0.5 credits. Students can complete Part A and Part B of a course to earn a full 1.0 credit of credit recovery.

Additional details about the Credit Recovery program can be found on the [Credit Recovery](#) page of our website.

## Credit Recovery Course Extension Request

If a student has not completed a credit recovery course by the end of 8 weeks, they are eligible to request a 2-week extension. Students with a VHS Learning Accommodation Form on file that stipulates extended time on assignments will be granted an additional 2-week extension after the first extension is complete, if needed.

To be eligible for a credit recovery course extension, the student must have completed at least 50% of the assignments in the course. Extension requests should be submitted via the [Service Center](#), prior to or on the student's course end date.

## Credit Recovery Course Partial Credit Request

Students are expected to complete all course content to receive credit for a credit recovery course. Workload reduction is not possible, due to the already abbreviated curricula in each course. If a student requires only part of a credit recovery course, the student's parent/guardian or site coordinator must submit a support request in the [Service Center](#).

If workload reduction is approved, the student and parent/guardian should understand that the following will apply:

- The teacher will exempt the student from all non-required assignments.
- The grade for completed assignments will be entered into the VHS Learning Student Information System, so that a school can view the students' earned score.
- A transcript for the course will not be generated, because the student did not earn credit for the course. VHS Learning staff will remove student access to the course transcript.

## Credit Recovery Course Truancy Policy

Due to the self-paced nature of the credit recovery program, the standard VHS Learning truancy policy does not apply. The site coordinator and guardian (if information is provided) will receive a weekly email that will include information about the student's progress in the course. It is expected that the site coordinator or guardian will review these emails regularly and connect with their student if they are not accessing the course.

To support continued student progress, the credit recovery teacher will monitor student participation using the following process:

- Email the site coordinator if the student has not logged in or completed work in a calendar week.
- If a student has not logged in for 2 weeks, the teacher will submit a support request and a member of the VHS Learning team will follow up to ensure the site coordinator is aware of the student's lack of engagement with the course. Include the following information:
  - Date of last course login.
  - Any information provided by the site coordinator and/or date of the last email from the site coordinator.
- Students who do not complete more than 50% of the course will not be allowed an extension.

## **Credit Recovery Course Tuition Refund**

Credit recovery tuition is refundable prior to the student's start date. Drops or transfers within the first 7 days after the start date will be refunded, less a \$75 fee. No tuition refund will be granted after the 7-day drop period.

## **Custom Offering Program**

We strive to help schools create a supplemental educational program that meets each school's unique needs. We are not a one-size-fits-all model; we work directly with schools and school administrators to customize solutions. Some schools have specific scheduling requirements, need content-only course licensing options, or prefer to enroll their students in a private cohort. Other schools prefer to offer courses in a blended implementation, using their own course instructors. In some cases, schools need a course off-cycle due to a short-term or longer-term teacher absence. We can work with your school to create a solution that meets your school's needs and time frame.

In addition to standard participation options, schools can run private/custom versions of credit recovery and school-year courses with a cohort of students from their own school. We can supply the course content, teacher (or schools can supply their own), and online classroom space. We can also customize teacher education and professional development programs to meet a school's needs. Contact us at 978.897.1900 to find out more about how your school can benefit from our custom offerings.