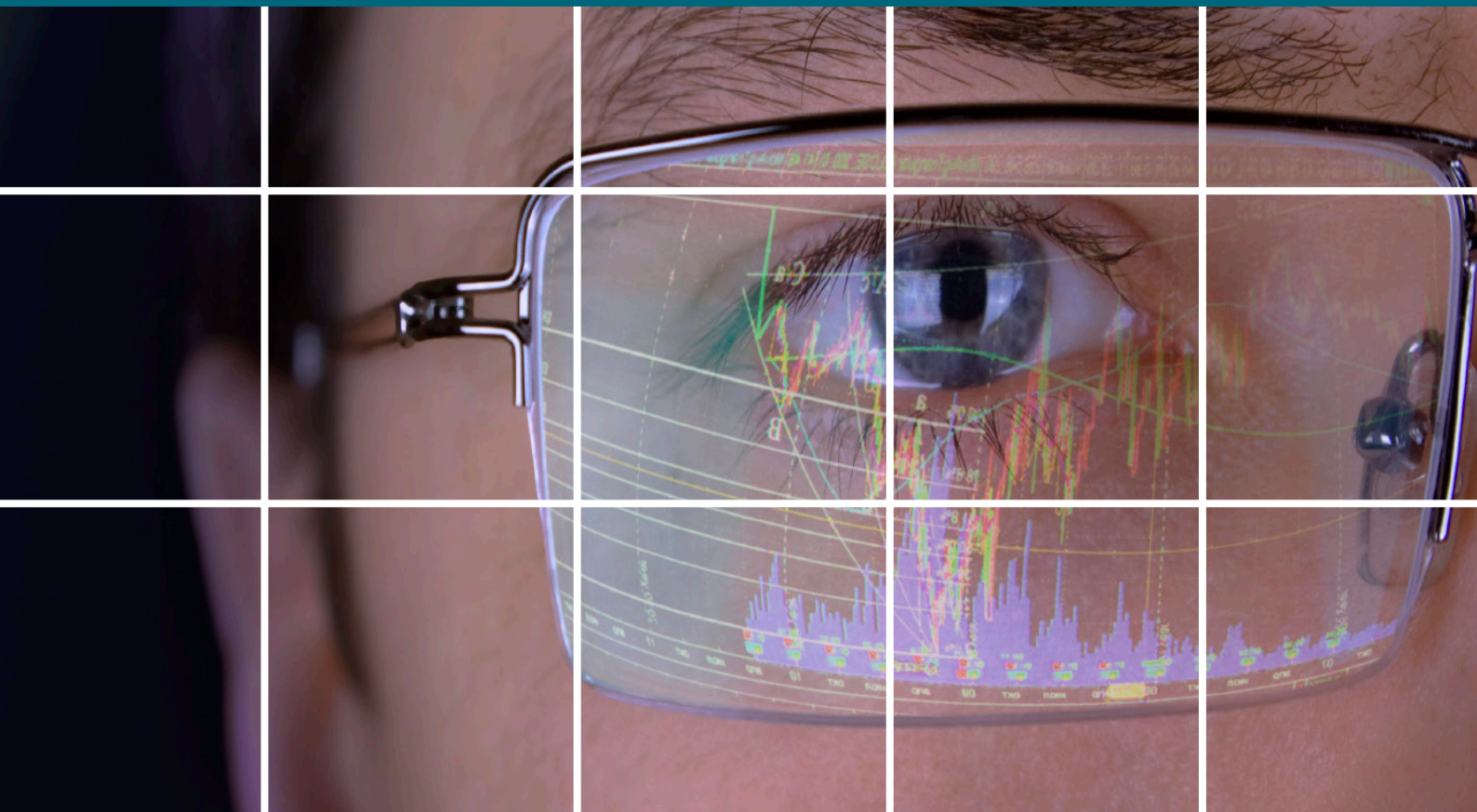


# Recruiting, Training, Supporting, and Evaluating Online Teachers:

*A Cross-Case Analysis of Teaching Infrastructure Across Virtual Schools*



**Written By: Kathryn Kennedy, Michigan Virtual University, with support from the**

*Virtual School Leadership Alliance (VSLA)*

Georgia Virtual Learning, Howard County Public School System, Idaho Digital Learning, IDEAL-New Mexico, Illinois Virtual School, Indiana Online Academy, *Michigan Virtual School*, Montana Digital Academy, North Carolina Virtual Public School, The Virtual High School (VHS), the Wisconsin eSchool Network, Wisconsin Virtual School, Virtual SC, and Evergreen Education Group

# Introduction

Teachers are one of the key building blocks of education systems. Schools, districts, and other education programs' processes for recruitment, licensure, hiring, training, and supporting teachers make a crucial difference in the health of a learning environment. For this reason, programs that hire and/or support teachers have a vested interest in them from recruitment through the length of their employment. Key to retaining these teachers are effectively designed training and support components of a program (Desimone, 2009). Based on the significance of this topic, the Virtual School Leadership Alliance made teacher support and retention their first major research effort. The Virtual School Leadership Alliance (Alliance) is an association of the chiefs of leading virtual schools across the country that provides collegial support and collaborative opportunities for the individual members and member organizations to share resources, services, and expertise. Members of the Alliance for 2014-15 include Georgia Virtual Learning, Howard County Public School System, Idaho Digital Learning, IDEAL-New Mexico, Illinois Virtual School, Indiana Online Academy, *Michigan Virtual School*, Montana Digital Academy, North Carolina Virtual Public School, The Virtual High School (VHS), the Wisconsin eSchool Network, Wisconsin Virtual School, and Virtual SC. Evergreen Education Group provides strategic guidance, conducts research, and coordinates the activities of the Alliance to ensure productive communication, collaboration, and value for each member.

As part of their research initiative, the Alliance wanted to collaborate on a project whereby members would take part in a cross-case analysis to study the similarities and differences across member programs with focus on teacher recruitment, hiring, training, support, evaluation, and retention. The *Michigan Virtual Learning Research Institute™ (MVLRI™)*, a division of *Michigan Virtual University® (MVU®)* conducted the research for this study. The methods used are described in the research methodology section.

Following the research methodology section, the case studies for each of the eight programs that participated in the research are presented. At the start of each case study, key features of the program are highlighted. Following the cases is an analysis of the cases that highlights similarities and differences across the programs.

## Research Methodology

This research used a case study (Feagin, 1991; Gilbert, 1981; Hamel, 1993; Stake, 1995) approach to describe the teacher processes of eight online learning programs. Each program is described thoroughly within the individual cases. The programs include (in the order that they will be released for this report) Georgia Virtual School, Idaho Digital Learning, Illinois Virtual School, Michigan Virtual School, Montana Digital Academy, The Virtual High School, Wisconsin eSchool Network, and Wisconsin Virtual School. Each program participated in semi-structured interviews/focus groups. Prior to the interviews/focus groups, participants were provided with a list of questions known as the Interview/Focus Group Protocol. The Protocol can be found in Addendum A. Additionally, a survey was administered to gather general information about each program's teacher population. The Teacher Information Survey is located in Addendum B. The survey was administered using Opinio, an online survey tool, subscribed to by MVU. MVLRI sent the Teacher Information Survey link to the programs; this link was then sent out to the programs' teacher populations. MVLRI conducted interviews/focus groups with contacts (listed below) at each of the programs:

## Research Methodology

### Georgia Virtual School

- Jay Heap, Director of Virtual Learning
- Joe Cozart, Assoc. Director of Strategic Planning

### Idaho Digital Learning Academy

- Jeff Simmons, Instructional Manager
- Brad Patzer, Supervision Manager
- Cynthia Lee, HR & Finance Manager

### Illinois Virtual School

- Cindy Hamblin, Director
- Barb Closen, Director of Operations
- Danielle Brush Lewis, Coordinator of Professional Development Services

### Montana Digital Academy

- Jason Neiffer, Assistant Director/Curriculum Director

### The Virtual High School

- John Englander, Director of Curriculum and Instruction
- Susan Leavey, Supervisor of Instruction

### Michigan Virtual School

- Donna Abel, Human Resources Administrator
- Mary Barry-Cybulski, Director of Curriculum and Instruction (Former)
- Jay Bennett, Sales and Business Developer (Former)
- Sarah Cook, Executive Director of Finance
- Gina Engler-Burton, Director of Human Resources
- Jamey Fitzpatrick, President and Chief Executive Officer
- Joe Freidhoff, Executive Director of *Michigan Virtual Learning Research Institute*
- Londa Horton, Instructional Manager
- Kirby Milton, Vice President of Business Services
- Mark Tesone, Project Manager

### Wisconsin eSchool Network

- John Jacobs, Director

### Wisconsin Virtual School

- Dawn Nordine, Executive Director
- Michele Nickels, Director

Interviews/focus groups lasted between 60 and 90 minutes. When additional information was needed, MVLRI corresponded with the program contacts via email. As a program's interviews, focus groups, and surveys were completed, a case was written and sent to the program contacts for review (See "member checks" in Guba & Lincoln, 1989; Miles & Huberman, 1994). Once approved by the respective program, the individual cases were added to the culminating report. When all cases were complete, MVLRI conducted a cross-case analysis to identify similarities and differences among the programs. Once the analysis was complete, the report was sent for review by all participating programs within the VSLA. Feedback from the VSLA was then used to update the culminating report.

### Acknowledgements

The author would like to thank Evergreen Education Group for their help in coordinating the study. Thanks also goes out to Rebecca Stimson, Kristen DeBruler, Justin Bruno, and Joe Freidhoff who assisted in final proofing, and Victoria Odson who developed the design and layout of the publication.

## Addendum A

### Interview/Focus Group Protocol

1. Describe your current instructional staff. Do you have any information about the demographics of your teachers?
  - a. How many teachers do you have? Which subjects do they teach?
  - b. How many male and female instructors do you have?
  - c. Where do your teachers live? Are they in-state and/or out-of-state? Are they across the state, country? Concentrated in one area of the state?
  - d. Do you regularly track any of this information? If so, do the demographics change over time? If yes, how have they changed, and why? Based on this question, do you track the following items and why?:
    - i. *Teacher Certification*
    - ii. *Education*
    - iii. *Employment History*
    - iv. *Technology access*
    - v. *Internet access*
    - vi. *Software they are comfortable using*
    - vii. *Experience related to OL/BL and any courses taken online or taught online*
    - viii. *Background checks*
    - ix. *Biographical sketch a description of their experiences*
    - x. *Teaching strategies*
    - xi. *Special talents which contribute to their success and that of their students when teaching online)*
  - e. How many years of experience do your teachers have teaching online?
  - f. How many years of experience do your teachers have teaching F2F?
  - g. Is diversity represented in your teacher population? If yes, how so?
  - h. What strategies, if any, does your school use to promote your teachers to the public?
2. What strategy(ies) do you use to recruit teachers?
3. What have you found to be the most effective strategy(ies) when recruiting teachers for your program?
4. What application materials do you require teacher applicants to submit?
5. What is conveyed in advertisements for open teaching positions? Do you have a copy of an announcement that I can attach with the summary as an example?
6. Please describe your interview procedures, including who is involved in the process, what the process entails, and what you ask candidates to do during the interview.

7. Do you ask the same questions to every teaching candidate? How many people are typically in the interviews? How are the interviews scored?
8. Who makes the final decisions about hiring? How does that person make the final decision? What does he/she take into account?
9. What do you look for in a teacher candidate? How did you come up with that criteria?
10. How do new hires go through Human Resources (HR)? What are the processes there? How do other processes get triggered by hiring, such as creation of credentials for all of their system accounts?
11. Does every teacher go through a background check?
12. Once teachers are hired, how do you determine the proper amount to train new teachers?
  - a. Is there a new teacher training? What does that new teacher training entail? Do all teachers receive the same new teacher training? If so, how long is it? How is it delivered, and what does each course/section entail? How has it changed over time? Why were those changes made?
  - b. What topics are covered in new teacher training?
  - c. Who provides the new teacher training?
  - d. Is there a mentoring program for new teachers? Please explain.
  - e. What are the biggest hurdles for new candidates?
  - f. What are some common issues that new teachers bring up?
  - g. In your opinion, how long does it take a teacher to get up to speed?
  - h. If we were to ask one of your online instructors that same question, what would some of the online instructors say to that? (Could I talk to a few of the instructors? If so, could you send me contact info for a few of them? Maybe a couple that are newer and a couple that have been with your program for awhile?)
13. Are there professional development/training opportunities available to teachers beyond the new teacher training?
  - a. If so, what do those include?
  - b. Are those mandatory/voluntary/go toward CEUs?
  - c. Who is responsible for providing the training?
  - d. What topics are covered in the ongoing PD/training opportunities?
14. What staffing model do you use?
  - a. Do you use contract teachers? If so, how does that work?
  - b. Are teachers full-time?
  - c. Do you have future plans to change your staffing model? If you are considering this, what would you change it to and why?

15. What teacher support structures do you currently use?
  - a. Do you have a teacher mentoring program? If so, please describe how it works.
  - b. Do you have communities of practice? If so, please describe how they work.
16. Do you evaluate teachers?
  - a. If so, how often? Who does the evaluation?
  - b. What are the criteria for evaluation?
  - c. If applicable, do full-time and contract teachers follow the same evaluation process?
  - d. What is the process for evaluation? Can you hypothetically walk through the process of a full evaluation and all of the steps?
  - e. Do you have a rubric or checklist that you use for evaluation? If so, did you build it or get it from another program, etc? Would you mind sharing the rubric with others?
  - f. Do you use particular standards when evaluating your teachers? If so, which standards?
  - g. Is evaluation part of promotion/retention? Please explain.
  - h. Are student feedback and student performance used in the evaluation? If so, how so?
  - i. Is there a set expectation for teachers to respond with feedback to students? For emails, phone calls, chats? For assignments?
  - j. Do you do anything special to recognize stellar instructors? If so, what?
17. What percentage of instructors do you retain from year to year?
18. How do you retain teachers?
  - a. Are there particular strategies you use?
  - b. If so, what are those strategies, and what do you think are the most effective strategies?
  - c. Please describe any challenges you face with retaining teachers.
  - d. What factors are there that cause teachers to sign back on/not sign back on with your program?
19. Is there anything you'd like to talk about that I haven't asked about?
20. Could you send me a copy of anything that you would like to highlight in this write-up, such as an evaluation form, staffing model, etc., that has worked really well?



## Addendum B

### Teacher Information Survey

#### About this Survey

*This survey is intended to generate a descriptive profile of MVS online instructors. The survey is 13 questions long and should take you less than 5 minutes to complete. In the survey, you will be asked about:*

- *Your educational background*
- *Your face-to-face and online teaching experiences*
- *Your demographic information*

*If you have any questions about this survey, please contact Dr. Kathryn Kennedy, (517) 664-5478, [kkennedy@mivu.org](mailto:kkennedy@mivu.org).*

*Please click the Start Button below to begin the survey.*

#### Educational Background

1. What's the highest degree you have earned?
  - a. Bachelor's degree
  - b. Master's degree
  - c. Professional degree – Ed.S.
  - d. Doctorate degree – Ph.D., Ed.D., M.D.
2. About how many online courses have you taken for credit, either for a degree and/or for professional development purposes?

***Now we'd like to know a bit about your face-to-face teaching experience including where you've taught and for how long.***

3. Have you EVER been a face-to-face teacher?
  - a. Yes
  - b. No
4. Are you CURRENTLY a face-to-face teacher anywhere?
  - a. Yes
  - b. No

5. Which of the following grade levels have you taught face-to-face? PLEASE CHECK ALL THAT APPLY.
- a. K-2
  - b. 3-5
  - c. 6-8
  - d. 9-12
  - e. Higher Ed
6. Which of the following content areas have you taught face-to-face? PLEASE CHECK ALL THAT APPLY.
- a. English
  - b. World Languages
  - c. Math
  - d. Science
  - e. Social Studies
  - f. Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

***Let's move on to your online teaching experience.***

7. How many years have you been teaching online?
8. How many years have you taught at PROGRAM, specifically?
9. Which of the following grade levels have you taught online? PLEASE CHECK ALL THAT APPLY
- a. K-2
  - b. 3-5
  - c. 6-8
  - d. 9-12
  - e. Higher Ed
10. Which of the following content areas have you taught online? PLEASE CHECK ALL THAT APPLY.
- a. English
  - b. World Languages
  - c. Math
  - d. Science
  - e. Social Studies
  - f. Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_



***Finally, please share some additional information about yourself.***

11. What is your gender?

- a. Female
- b. Male

12. Please choose one or more races:

- a. Hispanic or Latino
- b. American Indian or Alaska Native
- c. Asian
- d. Black or African American
- e. Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
- f. White
- g. Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

13. What is your current zip code?

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# Georgia Virtual School

## KEY FEATURES

- TOOL – Teaching Online Open Learning – is a required training that potential teacher applicants to GaVS need to complete before their applications are considered.
- Monthly online professional development is not required, but attendance is considered a part of evaluation.
- Two Symposiums per year bring teachers together face-to-face for intense training; and while attendance is not required, teaching assignments are affected by whether or not a teacher attends the Symposium.
- Quality Assurance Specialists serve as building administrators aligned to content areas; they are charged with conducting monthly virtual visits (formative evaluations) to help teachers prepare for their end-of-semester summative evaluations.

## Introduction

The Georgia Virtual School (GaVS®) “is a program of the Georgia Department of Education’s Office of Technology Services. The program is SACS CASI accredited and operates in partnership with schools and parents to offer middle school and high school level courses across the state. Georgia Virtual School provides a teacher-led, virtual classroom environment. Georgia Virtual School also equips students with an online media center and guidance center to support students throughout their online course experience. Georgia Virtual School has over 100 course offerings in the core content areas, world languages, CTAE, electives, and a vast AP course selection” (<http://www.virtualschoolalliance.org/georgia-virtual-school/>).

## About GaVS’s Instructional Staff

GaVS has an instructional staff consisting of approximately 200 employees. As of August 2014, there were 18 full-time employees, 22 part-time salaried teachers, and 170 adjunct employee teachers. The full-time teachers teach 450 segments<sup>1</sup> per year. Part-time teachers teach 220 segments per year; some part-time teachers teach in a face-to-face setting as well. Adjunct teachers teach anywhere from five to 80 segments per semester.

A survey was administered to GaVS teachers to gain additional information. A total of 58 instructors completed the survey; 75% of the respondents were female. The tables and graphs below provide some information about their background. Table 1 shows the breakdown of the ethnicity of the staff, while Table 2 shows their educational background.

1 1 segment = ½ Carnegie unit

**Table 1. Ethnicity**

Ethnicity	Frequency	Percentage
Hispanic or Latino	3	5.2%
Asian	2	3.5%
Black or African American	11	18.9%
White	41	70.7%
Other	1	1.7%

**Table 2. Highest degree earned**

Degree	Frequency	Percentage
Bachelor's degree	8	13.8%
Master's degree	30	51.7%
Professional degree – Ed.S.	17	29.3%
Doctorate degree – Ph.D., Ed.D., M.D.	3	5.2%

Most of the instructors said that they had taken at least nine courses online for a degree and/or professional development purposes. The maximum number of courses taken online by any teacher was 40 and the minimum was zero. When asked if they had ever been a face-to-face teacher, 100% reported that they had. When asked if they taught face-to-face currently, 58.3% answered yes. Table 3 shows the grade levels that the instructional staff is teaching and/or has taught face-to-face.

**Table 3. Grade levels taught face-to-face**

Grade Levels	Frequency	Percentage
K-2	1	1.2%
3-5	1	1.2%
6-8	16	18.6%
9-12	55	63.9%
Higher Ed	13	15.1%

Table 4 shows the subjects that the instructors have taught and/or are currently teaching face-to-face.

**Table 4. Subjects taught face-to-face**

Subject	Frequency
English	4
World Languages	3
Math	26
Science	29
Social Studies	7
Other*	6

\* Other – Computer Science, Credit Recovery, Forensic Science.

The median years teaching online reported by staff was 3.9, with a maximum of 25 years and a minimum of less than a year. When asked how many years they had been teaching at GaVS specifically, the median was around 3.2 years, while the maximum was 25 years, and the minimum was not yet a year.

Table 5 shows the grade levels that instructional staff was teaching at the time of the survey or has taught online.

**Table 5. Grade levels taught online**

Grade Levels	Frequency	Percentage
K-2	0	--
3-5	1	1.3%
6-8	20	25.3%
9-12	53	67.1%
Higher Ed	5	6.3%

Table 6 shows the subjects that the instructors have taught and/or were currently teaching online.

**Table 6. Subjects taught online**

Subject	Frequency
English	1
World Languages	3
Math	22
Science	26
Social Studies	3
Other*	3

\* Other – Computer Science; Reaching Your Academic Potential

The majority of the instructors were located in Georgia. Table 7 illustrates the counties in which the teachers resided. Five teachers reported that they lived outside the state, within the following cities and states: Lutz, Florida; Arlington, Tennessee; Sugarland, Texas (2); Greenwood, South Carolina; and Greer, South Carolina.

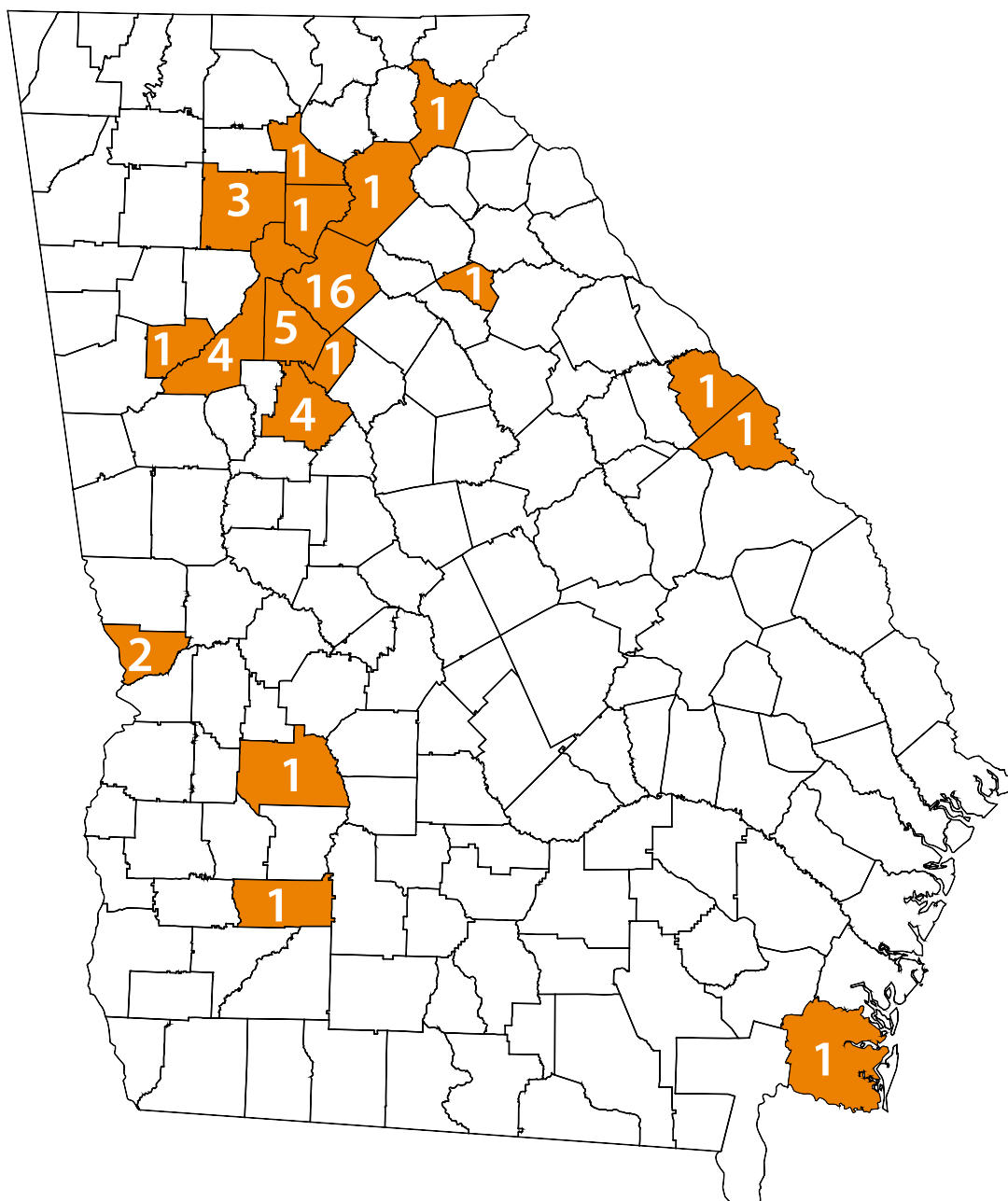
**Table 7. Instructor locations in Georgia by county (ordered by high to low frequency)**

County (GA)	Cities	# of Instructors
Gwinnett	Lawrenceville (6), Duluth (2), Loganville (2), Norcross (2), Suwannee (2), Snellville (2), Grayson, Dacula	18
DeKalb	Decatur, Stone Mnt., Ellenwood, N. Druid Hills, Clarkston	5
Fulton	Atlanta (3), Fairburn, Sandy Springs	5
Henry	McDonough	4
Cherokee	Canton (2), Woodstock	3
Muscogee	Columbus	3
Forsyth	Cumming	2
Camden	St. Marys	1
Clarke	Athens	1
Columbia	Evans	1
Dawson	Dawsonville	1
Dougherty	Albany	1
Douglas	Lithia Springs	1
Fayette	Fayetteville	1
Habersham	Demorest	1
Hall	Flowery Branch	1
Jackson	Jefferson	1
Richmond	Hephzibah	1
Rockdale	Conyers	1
Sumter	Americus	1

\*Number in parentheses is the number of instructors from that city. If there is only one instructor from a location, parentheses are not used after a city.

The map below shows the instructors' distribution per county across the state of Georgia.

**Map. GaVS instructors per county in the state of Georgia**





## Recruit & Hire

GaVS's key recruiting strategy is the career page on their website. Typically, job advertisements include information about the job posting, Georgia certification requirement, TOOL completion requirement, and a link to the application. GaVS also recruits by attending professional conferences (content-specific, general education, technology) and setting up information booths. Additionally, GaVS receives referrals from their current instructional staff.

GaVS requires applicants to fill out an online application and submit an online resume. The applicants must be Georgia-certified teachers and must supply all of their certification information. Prospective teachers also must have already completed GaVS's TOOL<sup>2</sup> course. The TOOL course began in 2014 and is a free, 30-hour professional development course that centers on effective online teaching. The five main topics included in TOOL are (1) Participate (digital citizenship), (2) Navigation (moving around the LMS), (3) Communicate (how to communicate with parents, students, other teachers, stakeholders etc.), (4) Create (learning how to design content online), and (5) Evaluate (understanding data analytics and how data is used to make instructional decisions). In conjunction with some of the teacher education programs in Georgia, GaVS offers facilitated versions of TOOL. From the TOOL course, the GaVS staff can evaluate prospective teachers' quality of work, course engagement, and timeliness of each response. Hiring staff prefer applicants who have already taught online; GaVS reviews the applicant's total years of teaching experience and the subject area that the teacher is teaching/has taught.

The interview process includes a web-based interview via Adobe Connect that takes 30 minutes to an hour. Typical items include "how do you structure your day," "tell us about your experience with online learning," "describe your comfort learning new technologies," and "how do you personalize instruction." GaVS searches for teachers who value personalizing and differentiating learning in any setting. They look for technology enthusiasts who they feel tend to do better in the online learning environment. GaVS also seeks those teachers who are personally connected or recommended by teachers who are already employed by GaVS. The interviews are conducted by the Supervisor and/or Assistant Supervisor of Instruction and a department chair. The Supervisor of Instruction determines the names that will be passed onto the State Board of Education, and the Board makes the final decision. All teachers must undergo a background check before being hired.

## Train & Support

Once hired, the prospective hires go through an online orientation to Desire2Learn, GaVS's Learning Management System. Teachers are given their credentials for logging into the various systems used by GaVS during a short teacher training program designed and provided by the GaVS Teacher Quality Team. The Coordinator for Teacher Quality provides high-level support for the overall strategy of the training program, and most of the actual training is from a teacher quality specialist. The systems the teachers are trained to use include the student information system, the learning management

system, Google apps for email and document sharing, and Adobe Connect for meetings. They are also paired with a mentor teacher, preferably in their content area, for one or two semesters. Common issues faced by new teachers in the first year include time management, understanding the workload, aspects of the LMS, and the importance of following GaVS policies (often teachers feel they have more freedom around schedules and how often they contact parents, as they do in their traditional setting, etc).

GaVS offers a monthly online professional development activity that is not required, but attendance does figure into the teachers' evaluations; the teachers are required to complete a certain number of these trainings per year. The topics for these trainings include new elements of the LMS, ways to communicate with students, how to host an active synchronous session, and how to create a better newsletter. They are typically led by teachers who are successful in the topic areas being presented. There are also two professional learning symposia held per year that bring all of the teachers together face-to-face for intensive training. Teachers' attendance at the professional learning symposia are tied to the number of segments assigned to them. If teachers do not attend the symposia, they will not be assigned as many segments as someone who does attend. Typically 90% of GaVS teachers attend the symposia.

Another form of teacher support is GaVS's use of Quality Assurance Specialists (QASs). QASs are building administrators who are aligned with the content area departments. The QASs conduct virtual visits within classes monthly to help every teacher get ready for their end-of-semester summative evaluation (See *Evaluate* section for more details on the summative evaluation). Overall, it takes most of the GaVS hires about a semester to be comfortable in the online learning environment.

## Evaluate

Teachers are formally evaluated every semester at GaVS. As mentioned previously, the QAS also does a summative evaluation at the end of the semester in addition to the formative evaluations done throughout the semester. Each QAS performs between 10-25 summative teacher evaluations per semester (See Appendix GA-1). Evaluations are based on the iNACOL *Standards for Quality Online Teaching*. GaVS modified the iNACOL criteria because their teachers are not responsible for altering content. Georgia-specific requirements were also added to the GaVS evaluations.

Additionally, GaVS expects their teachers to respond to student emails within 24 hours, and grade assignments/activities within 72 hours. Leniency in this policy may be allowed; for example, an English teacher may assign an essay and have a large number of them to grade within a specified time frame. In this case and others like it, teachers are expected to inform students when they will receive feedback.

Evaluations are used by GaVS to decide how many segments to assign each teacher. If the teacher is not performing well, they will be assigned fewer segments; if the teacher is performing well, they will be assigned more segments. A course survey is given to students each semester, and the results of this survey are used during the evaluation process as well. Additionally, student pass rates are indicators used within the summative evaluations.

## Retain

At the start of the spring semester, GaVS emails their teachers to try to get an idea about which teachers are going to return the following year. Of the teachers who worked at GaVS during the 2012-2013 school year, 78% returned for the 2013-2014 school year. GaVS provides various incentives to help retain their instructional staff.

In addition to the incentives already mentioned – professional development and formal mentoring – GaVS provides teachers with opportunities to attain Master Teacher distinction. If a teacher has been with GaVS for three years and has had high evaluative marks on their teaching observations and student evaluations, they can apply to be a Master Teacher. Contract teachers who attain Master Teacher status receive a pay increase, while full-time teachers receive the distinction of “Master Teacher” only. Before attaining the Master Teacher distinction, teachers can become mentor teachers to both new teachers as well as pre-service teachers who are completing the field experience component of their teacher education program. While they are not responsible for fewer segments, mentor teachers do receive a pay increase. Experienced teachers can also become verifiers in the TOOL professional development course. Verifiers check to make sure the teacher learners complete their TOOL-assigned work. The TOOL course has a badging feature that continues beyond the course itself and allows teachers to be recognized for their accomplishments. Some of the distinctions include having taught 1000 students, teaching for five years, being a mentor, etc. During the professional learning symposia, GaVS takes time to recognize their exemplary teachers.



## Appendix GA-1



### Teacher Observation Rubric 2013-2014

This instrument is intended to identify the best practices of online instruction and to provide meaningful feedback to Georgia Virtual Learning teachers. The primary purpose of this tool is to continuously improve instruction and ultimately student achievement. This version is modified from the 2012-2013 version in the following manner:

- elimination of the Synchronous session and ePortfolio categories
- new emphasis on communication log with change in email
- addition of Data Analysis as distinct category
- add significance to the order and weight of categories
- combined student and stakeholder communication

**The rubric contains seven categories; each category is rated on a four-point scale as follows:**

#### **1. EXCEPTIONAL - Exceeds Expectations:**

Teachers that display the skills and effort necessary for this rating are considered experts in the category. Their work is exceptional and should be shared in professional development opportunities. Generally, only one aspect of exceptional needs to be met for this distinction. All indicators for the meets category has to be met as well.

#### **2. MASTERY - Meets Expectations:**

The standards for quality instruction at the Georgia Virtual Learning are set very high. Our program is nationally recognized for the breadth and depth of our courses. Teachers that meet the expectations are by default among the best teachers in the state and at the forefront of online education in the nation.

#### **3. ATTENTION NEEDED - Below**

**Expectations:** An observation that identifies a category below expectations is an alert to modify or rectify the skills or activity to meet the expectations. This rating may also indicate that professional development is necessary in this field.

**4. Does not meet:** A rating at this level signals that the instructor has not followed required procedures and must document how they met expectations immediately.

Observation Categories:

1. Grading

2. Policy

3. Communication

4. Homepages
5. Discussions

6. Data Analysis

7. Differentiation

1. Grading

**Statement:** The online instructor provides timely and quality feedback for all graded assignments. Grades and feedback reflect current and accurate student progress. Grading is placed as the top priority because it is essential for the quality of the student’s academic experience. Meaningful feedback will lead to differentiation and individualization of the learning pathway.

Entering zeros after each benchmark reflects an updated report to student, parents, teachers, and administration.

Indicators of Success:

- Grading for all assignments (quizzes, dropboxes, discussions) is completed within 72 hours.
- Feedback is meaningful and specific to the student and the assignment.
- Rubrics are used when applicable as a best practice.
- Late work policy is followed and documented in all feedback for late assignments.
- Zeros are entered systematically after each benchmark.
- Teacher follows the policy on dropping grades at the end of the semester.

## Ratings:

### 1. EXCEPTIONAL - Exceeds Expectations:

- ☐ Instructor consistently grades assignments within 24 hours before required time frame.
- ☐ Instructor consistently provides feedback that includes links to outside sources and/or references the content for both remediation and enrichment.
- ☐ Instructor provides feedback for assignments not submitted and includes dates for future late submissions.
- ☐ Instructor employs approved alternate assignments to ensure student success.
- ☐ Instructor provides exemplars of acceptable and exceptional work.

### 2. MASTERY - Meets Expectations:

- ☐ Instructor grades assignments within the required time frame.
- ☐ Instructor provides specific and individualized feedback for all discussions, quizzes, and dropbox items.
- ☐ Feedback includes strengths, weaknesses, and suggestions for improvement.
- ☐ Rubrics are used when applicable or required by dept.
- ☐ Grading and feedback adheres to late policy.
- ☐ Late submissions are documented in feedback.
- ☐ Instructor provides specific dates for late work policy in the feedback.
- ☐ Instructor provides feedback for assignments not submitted and includes dates for future late submissions.
- ☐ Instructor uses video, audio, and images in feedback as appropriate.

### 3. ATTENTION NEEDED - Below Expectations:

- ☐ Assignments are not graded within the required time frame.
- ☐ No feedback (only score) for some or all assignments.
- ☐ Feedback is not specific, i.e. "good job."
- ☐ Feedback is not individualized.
- ☐ Late policy is not followed, or documentation is not included.
- ☐ Zeros are not entered after benchmark date.

**4. DOES NOT MEET:** A rating at this level signals that the instructor has not followed required procedures and must document how they met expectations.

## 2. Policy

**Statement:** All school policies and procedures must be followed. Teachers should refer to the Teacher Handbook for specific written policy. Department coordinators may also communicate policy or procedure during the semester. Special education accommodations/modifications are made and clearly communicated to students and parents. Teachers must follow school policies to ensure a consistent, quality experience for all our students. Policy also reflects legal obligations to our students and stakeholders.

### Indicators of Success:

- Instructors are aware of specific policies in the Teacher Handbook.
- Instructors **respond** to instructions from department coordinators, instructional leaders, and administration according to guidelines and timelines.
- Instructors respond to surveys and requests for information according to instructions.
- Initial communication has been made with Special Education stakeholders regarding how teacher will handle accommodations/modifications.
- Quiz accommodations are set up correctly.
- Teachers hold welcome sessions for each group of students by start date (18 week, 16 week, 14 week, 12 week) if applicable.
- Student names should not be displayed on sample work *unless* teacher has permission from the student.

### Ratings:

#### 1. MASTERY - Meets Expectations:

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Instructors respond to instructions from department coordinator, instructional leaders, and administration according to guidelines and timelines.    | <input type="checkbox"/> Special Education accommodations are made and communicated to parent and student within two workdays of receiving accommodations from the Special Education department. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Instructors need to enter their courses every workday.   | <input type="checkbox"/> Accommodations are put into effect with 72 hours of receiving them from Special Education department.   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Instructors need to check email every workday.   | <input type="checkbox"/> Teachers follow all policy and procedures as outlined in the Teacher Handbook.  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Instructors not able to enter the courses or check email need to contact their department coordinator and follow guidelines for substitute teachers. |  |

**4. DOES NOT MEET:** A rating at this level signals that the instructor has not followed required procedures and must document how they met expectations.



### 3. Communication

**Statement:** Student success is promoted and facilitated through regular interaction, prompt response, and clear expectations. Communication encompasses every facet of online teaching. Documenting this communication assists the program in offering a consistent, quality experience for our students and stakeholders. Students whose parents are active in their formal education have more long-term academic achievement. These students also have higher grades, higher test scores, positive attitudes, and good behavior.

*\*Fall 2013: With the move to Google Mail the documentation in the communication log has increased in importance. The administration can still research email and communication by teachers, but the process is tedious and time consuming. Georgia Virtual Learning is developing a new information system that will streamline the process for documenting communication for everyone. For this semester, it is critical that these guidelines are followed.*

#### Indicators of Success:

- Communication log is populated, detailed, updated consistently, and organized.
- Welcome email and phone calls should be completed within 3 days of a student entering a course. This communication should be documented within one week.
- Communication log contains specific information and actual date of contact.
- Communication log has multiple entries documenting different forms of student and stakeholder communication such as phone calls, emails, welcome calls, notes about specific issues, failure calls, non-participation calls, and any other information a teacher feels is important for administration to know about the student.
- Communication log has multiple entries documenting different forms of communication such as phone calls, emails, welcome calls, notes about specific issues, failure calls.
- Biweekly course updates are sent to students, correct stakeholders (parents, guardians, and facilitators\*) and assigned Quality Assurance Specialist. Some facilitators may ask not to have these updates.
- A variety of learning management system tools are utilized to communicate with students including Adobe Connect sessions/recordings.
- Emails are returned to students, stakeholders, and administration within 1 school day.
- Contacts stakeholders regarding students who are not participating;
- Stakeholders (parent/guardian, facilitator, and Department Coordinator) are copied on all individual student emails related to issues or policies not being followed.
- Teacher consults administration before making exceptions to school policies and procedures. If policy exceptions are approved, teacher documents details in Communication Log.
- All teachers that have been assigned a mentor should include their mentor in all communication that also is entered in the Communication Log as well as the biweekly course updates.

## Ratings:

### 1. EXCEPTIONAL - Exceeds Expectations:

- ☐ Communication with students and stakeholders is consistently provided quickly and thoroughly.
- ☐ Communication with students and stakeholders is offered in a variety of formats, phone calls, newsletters, video, synchronous sessions for groups and individuals.
- ☐ Course updates are attractive, interesting, and informative, and can be exemplars for other teachers.
- ☐ Potential issues are addressed proactively and documented in the Communication Log, thereby maintaining a positive and engaging classroom environment which promotes student success.
- ☐ Instructor consistently reaches out to students, parents, and facilitators to share positive information as well as encouragement for improvement
- ☐ Maintains constant and productive communication with stakeholders that encourage classroom involvement from parents and facilitators.
- ☐ Displays innovation in communicating with students and stakeholders.

### 2. MASTERY - Meets Expectations:

- ☐ Communication log has all welcome calls and emails, communication about failing students, serious student issues, special education modification notices to student/stakeholders, and any modifications to student schedule or approved adjustments to GaVL policies.
- ☐ Instructor responds to communication by student, stakeholders, and administration within one school day.
- ☐ Communication is always professional & courteous.
- ☐ Course updates are sent biweekly to students, stakeholders, and QAS.
- ☐ A variety of communication, including news announcements, emails, pages, and phone calls, is used to communicate information with students.
- ☐ All communication conforms to FERPA regulations about protecting student privacy and maintain a safe, friendly, learning environment.

### 2. ATTENTION NEEDED - Below Expectations:

- ☐ Instructor does not consistently respond to communication from students, stakeholders, and administration in a timely fashion.
- ☐ Instructor does not send course updates to students, stakeholders, or QAS on biweekly basis.
- ☐ Instructor does not update the Communication Log to reflect communication about failing students, serious student issues, special education modification notices to student/stakeholders, and any modifications to student schedule or approved adjustments to GaVL policies.
- ☐ Communication log entries are insufficient to explain student issues or specific modifications.
- ☐ Instructor does not document notification to stakeholders regarding non-participation of students.

**4. DOES NOT MEET:** A rating at this level signals that the instructor has not followed required procedures and must document how they met expectations.

## 4. Homepage

**Statement:** The Homepage is the gateway for student/teacher interaction. The classroom homepage is a welcoming, interactive, timely, and informative environment. Organization and information are keys for success in online education. Homepages need to be organized according to Georgia Virtual Learning guidelines. They need to be professional and well maintained. Homepages represent the quality of the program and the instructor.

*\* In Fall 2013, the Georgia Virtual Mentors will assess the indicators and ratings for this category to reflect best practices and specific expectations.*

### Indicators of Success:

- Format
- Widgets on the homepages conform to GaVL guidelines
- Links on the Homepages are active and broken link fixed quickly
- Fonts, images, audio, and video meet accessibility standards
- News
- Announcements are posted weekly
- Start date included
- End date included if appropriate
- News announcements are current, inviting, and informative
- New announcements are varied -- text/images -- so that they are not confused with older announcements
- News is used to communicate clear and concise information as well as provide additional materials, resources, and opportunities for students
- Conditional release is utilized to customize the classroom for different groups of students
- News announcements should be created in a way that does not distract from the learning environment. It is important to be cognizant of the varying Internet connections and devices students use to access the LMS.

*\* Student names should not be displayed on sample work unless teacher has permission from the student.*

## Ratings:

### 1. EXCEPTIONAL - Exceeds Expectations:

- ☐ The classroom is student centered or a source of encouragement for students.
- ☐ Displays student work as exemplars.\*
- ☐ Uses conditional released items and data to provide differentiation and individualized feedback to students.
- ☐ External resources.
- ☐ Innovative technology tools beyond those provided by the LMS are integrated to capture the essence of anytime, anyplace learning opportunities; examples include: YouTube, Twitter, Jings, Voki, explanations of how to create or use tools.
- ☐ It is evident when the announcement was posted because the start date is present.

### 2. MASTERY - Meets Expectations:

- ☐ Weekly announcement posted each week.
- ☐ Start date is indicated on all announcements.
- ☐ When necessary for clarity and to remove clutter, ending dates are set.
- ☐ Announcements are current and interactive (contains resources), display valuable information, and/or offer students additional learning opportunities.
- ☐ Information is easily identified and found in the appropriate widget on the homepage.
- ☐ Directions that navigate the student away from the homepage or learning management system are clear.

### 3. ATTENTION NEEDED - Below Expectations:

- ☐ Homepage is orderly but is not inviting or engaging for students.
- ☐ News announcements contain minimal information or do not convey timely or relevant information; they are not updated each week.
- ☐ Starting date is not indicated.
- ☐ Announcements are distracting due to the content presentation. The image size and font size distract from the information being presented.
- ☐ Information or directions within announcements, information within widgets, and/or course syllabi convey incorrect information or contain typos.

**4. DOES NOT MEET:** A rating at this level signals that the instructor has not followed required procedures and must document how they met expectations.

## 5. Discussions

**Statement:** Discussions are a powerful communication and education tools. Teachers are responsible for maintaining meaningful threads of discussion that support the content in the course. Discussions are particularly valuable as a tool that encourages student participation in online learning and writing and responding to discussion posts. Discussions also allow for an open forum to exchange amongst a community of learners. Discussions online often exceed the limitations of the face-to-face class by allowing students to communicate socially without social pressures.

### Indicators of success:

- Instructor monitors discussions on a daily basis.
- Instructor will curate conversations leading to critical thinking.
- Discussions offer opportunities to enhance the content through explanation, remediation, and enrichment.
- Discussions facilitate student's voices.
- Discussion prompts and responses include audio/visual elements in addition to text.

### Ratings:

#### 1. EXCEPTIONAL - Exceeds Expectations:

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Teacher responds to discussion <i>threads</i> daily.                              | <input type="checkbox"/> Socratic method leads to critical thinking and independent learning. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Posts enliven and enhance the discussion.   | <input type="checkbox"/> Audio/video is effectively utilized.                                 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Discussions enhance the content through explanation, remediation, and enrichment. | <input type="checkbox"/> Outside resources and current events are linked.                     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Teachers encourage student ownership of the dialogue.                             |   |

#### 2. MASTERY - Meets Expectations:

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Teacher monitors discussion <i>topics</i> daily.                     | <input type="checkbox"/> Discussions enhance the content and work. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Teacher focuses discussions on critical thinking and course content. | <input type="checkbox"/> Discussions facilitate student's voices.  |

#### 3. ATTENTION NEEDED - Below Expectations:

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Teacher responds to discussion <i>forums</i> infrequently. | <input type="checkbox"/> Discussions do not add relevance to the content. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Posts do little to further the conversation.               |   |

**4. DOES NOT MEET:** A rating at this level signals that the instructor has not followed required procedures and must document how they met expectations.

## 6. Data Analysis

**Statement:** Data Analysis presents a category in which online learning has a distinct advantage over face-to-face instruction. The amount of data and more importantly the quality of the data available is a useful tool for ensuring student success. Advanced data analysis by online instructors is still in the preliminary stages. The primary purpose of adding this element to the observation rubric is to begin the discussion and reflect on the possible best practices.

**ePortfolio:** This category of the observation rubric will be provided in the Instructor's ePortfolio. All of the requirements and dates for ePortfolio can be found in the ePortfolio Protocol document.

**Fall 2013:** Georgia Virtual Learning will institute a program-wide discussion on the data available to teachers. Professional development will be offered to ensure that these tasks are efficient and meaningful. Instructors will reflect on the different data sources in their ePortfolios. The schedule for these submissions is contained on the ePortfolio Protocol.

### Possible Data Sources

- **Reporting tools in Learning Management System:**

- Statistics in quizzes, discussions
- User progress
- Class progress

- **Analytics Portal Reports:**

- Tool usage
- Quiz question analysis

- **Survey data from Evaluation KIT**

- **Shmoop data (AP courses)**

- **Student Longitudinal Data System (when integrated)**

- **Standardized Test results**

## Ratings:

### 1. EXCEPTIONAL - Exceeds Expectations:

- ☐ Instructor utilizes various streams of data to create individualized learning plans or specific actions that benefit student success.
- ☐ Instructor finds different streams of data that assist in student success.
- ☐ Instructor takes specific actions based on survey results.
- ☐ Instructor analyzes standardized test results and institutes specific curriculum differentiation.

### 2. MASTERY - Meets Expectations:

- ☐ Instructor reflects on specific data source/report in ePortfolio according to protocol.
- ☐ Reflections include analysis of source and specific action plan that could be enacted.

### 3. ATTENTION NEEDED - Below Expectations:

- ☐ Data analysis is incomplete.
- ☐ Data provided but no reflection.
- ☐ Reflection present but does not focus on data analysis.

**4. DOES NOT MEET:** A rating at this level signals that the instructor has not followed required procedures and must document how they met expectations.



## 7. Differentiation

**Statement:** While much differentiation is built into Georgia Virtual Learning courses, each teacher should provide additional opportunities to students for enrichment, remediation, and discovery of new technologies. Emphasis should be placed on building 21st century skills: collaboration, cooperation, communication, creativity, organization, problem solving, self-direction, social responsibility, and technology fluency. All students learn differently and students should be aware of how they learn best. Online learning should provide students the opportunity to use their strengths as well as techniques for adapting for their weaknesses.

**ePortfolio:** This category of the observation rubric will be provided in the Instructor's ePortfolio. All of the requirements and dates for ePortfolio can be found in the ePortfolio Protocol document.

### Ratings:

#### 1. EXCEPTIONAL - Exceeds Expectations:

- ☐ Offers multiple alternative assignments throughout the semester that are designed for learning styles other than the ones addressed in the lesson assignments.
- ☐ Consistently records audio to augment written feedback for students.
- ☐ Tests all students to determine their learning style.
- ☐ Teacher uses Web 2.0 tools to cater to different learning styles.
- ☐ Offers students additional remediation through recorded demonstrations recorded with Jing, Snagit, or similar tools.
- ☐ Teacher offers integrated instruction in 21st century skills.

#### 2. MASTERY - Meets Expectations:

- ☐ Differentiates instruction to maximize student success.
- ☐ Offers alternative assignments and resources that are designed for different learning styles.
- ☐ Provides targeted enrichment and remediation experience for students.
- ☐ Records audio and video feedback for alternate learning styles.
- ☐ Provides lessons for multiple learning styles.
- ☐ Documents differentiation in ePortfolio according to protocol deadlines.

#### 3. ATTENTION NEEDED - Below Expectations:

- ☐ Offers insufficient alternative assignments.
- ☐ Gives no audio or video feedback.
- ☐ Fails to provide any type of remediation to struggling or inactive students.

**4. DOES NOT MEET:** A rating at this level signals that the instructor has not followed required procedures and must document how they met expectations.

# Idaho Digital Learning Academy

## KEY FEATURES

IDLA has Instructor Expectations that prospective teachers must meet in order to apply.

Each content area has a mentor teacher who acts as a point of contact for new or struggling teachers.

IDLA established Professional Learning Communities in Google+ that are designed as book clubs.

Evaluations are used to determine bonus pay and teaching assignments.

## Introduction

Idaho Digital Learning Academy “is a state-sponsored, accredited, online school created to provide students with greater access to a wide variety of courses taught by highly qualified faculty.” Their goal “is to provide choice, accessibility, flexibility, quality, and equity in curricular offerings for students in Idaho.” Their mission “is to serve the students, school districts, and the State of Idaho by providing a high quality public school education, aligned with state achievement standards, utilizing innovative e-learning methods of delivery.”

## IDLA’s Instructional Staff

IDLA has 282 part-time teachers in core and electives and five full-time teachers in Spanish, math, English, and science. They have 202 female instructors and 80 male instructors. Part-time teachers are part-time employees. The majority of part-time teaching faculty are employed as full-time teachers in face-to-face districts or other full-time virtual schools. IDLA teachers are typically assigned one to two sections per semester, with approximately 30 enrollments per section. Instructors live all across the state, and a few live out of state. IDLA instructional staff consists of instructors who are flexible, self-aware, and effective at motivating and engaging their students. IDLA shares information about their teachers with the public through marketing materials provided to schools as well as in reports to the Legislature and the State Board of Education.

The biggest challenge IDLA reported with their current instructional model is the shift they are seeing in student access. Over 50% of their students are now accessing their courses from their school during the day. This has given rise to the expectation that teachers will likewise be accessible during daytime hours and available to provide intervention or support. Any changes to the IDLA model will be a reflection of this challenge. Having full-time teachers with daytime availability has helped address the issue. They are also building a tutoring tool that could potentially make a pool of tutors available to students during the day if/when their teacher is unavailable.

An online survey was administered using a tool called Opinio. A total of 140 instructors completed the survey. The data is shared below. Table 1 shows the breakdown of the ethnicity of the staff, while Table 2 shows their educational background.

**Table 1. Ethnicity**

ETHNICITY	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
Hispanic or Latino	4	2.9%
American Indian or Alaska Native	1	0.7%
Asian	1	0.7%
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	1	0.7%
White	136	97.1%

**Table 2. Highest degree earned**

DEGREE	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
Bachelor's degree	52	37.1%
Master's degree	86	61.4%
Professional degree – Ed.S.	2	1.4%
Doctorate degree – Ph.D., Ed.D., M.D.	0	-

The median number of classes that teachers have taken online for a degree and/or professional development purposes was 13. While 97.9% percent of respondents indicated prior experience as a face-to-face teacher, 59.9% are currently teaching face-to-face. Table 3 shows the grade levels that the instructional staff was teaching at the time of the survey/has taught face-to-face. Table 4 shows the subjects that the instructors were currently teaching face-to-face at the time of the survey/have taught face-to-face.

**Table 3. Grade levels taught face-to-face**

GRADE LEVELS	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
K-2	8	5.8%
3-5	9	6.5%
6-8	82	59%
9-12	129	92.8%
Higher Ed	35	25.2%

**Table 4. Subjects taught face-to-face**

SUBJECT	FREQUENCY
English	49
World Languages	18
Math	30
Science	24
Social Studies	40
Other*	63

\* Other – Driver’s Education, Physical Education, Health, Business, Speech/Communication, Computer, Special Education, English as a Second Language, Drama, Literacy, Psychology, Art, Family and Consumer Sciences

The staff’s median years of teaching online was 5.5 years with a minimum of 0 year(s) and a maximum of 12 years. When asked how many years they had been teaching at IDLA specifically, the median was 4.7 years, the maximum was 12 years, and the minimum was 0 years. Table 5 shows the grade levels that instructional staff was teaching at the time of this survey or has taught online. Table 6 shows the subjects that the instructors have taught/were teaching online at the time of this survey.

**Table 5. Grade levels taught online**

GRADE LEVELS	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
K-2	-	-
3-5	2	1.5%
6-8	64	47.1%
9-12	135	99.3%
Higher Ed	21	15.4%

**Table 6. Subjects taught online**

SUBJECT	FREQUENCY
English	34
World Languages	14
Math	21
Science	18
Social Studies	28
Other*	39

\* Other – Communication/Speech, Family and Consumer Sciences, Culinary Arts, Health, Driver’s Education, Art, Photography, Psychology, Computer Science, Health, Business, Technology, Career Development

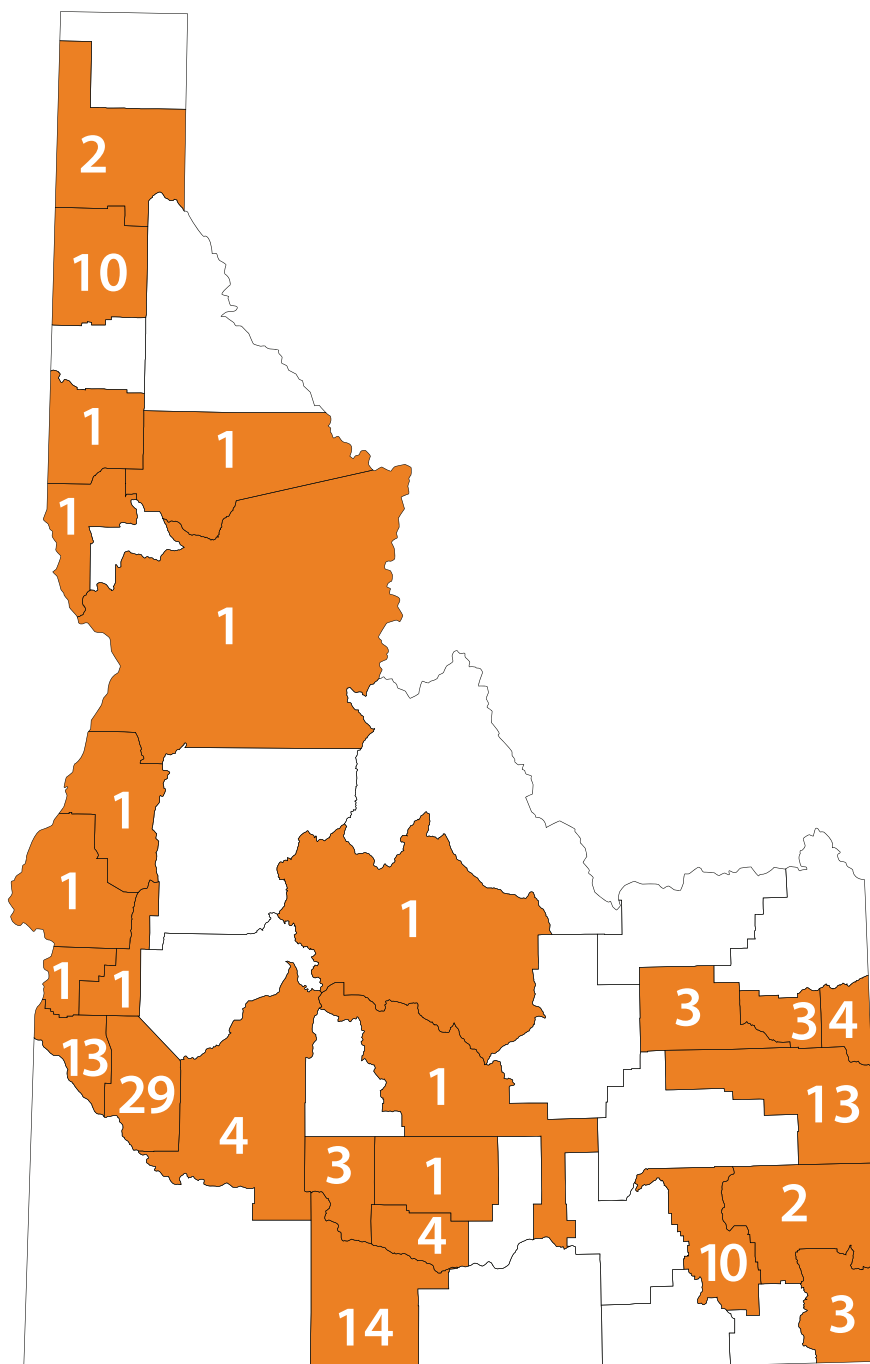
The majority of the instructors were located in Idaho. Table 7 illustrates the counties in which the teachers reside. Twelve teachers reported that they lived outside of Idaho, within the following cities and states: Tucson, Arizona (2); Layton, Utah (2); Draper, Utah; Tooele, Utah; Green River, Wyoming; Hamilton, Montana; Helena, Montana; Oak Creek, Colorado; Puyallup, Washington; and Spokane, Washington.

**Table 7. Instructor locations in Idaho by county (ordered by high to low frequency)**

COUNTY (ID)	CITIES	# OF INSTRUCTORS
Ada	Boise (18), Kuna (4), Meridian (4), Eagle (2), Garden City	29
Twin Falls	Twin Falls (12), Kimberly, Murtaugh	14
Bonneville	Idaho Falls (10), Iona (2), Ammon	13
Canyon	Nampa (6), Caldwell (5), Melba, Middleton	13
Bannock	Pocatello (6), Chubbuck (2), Arbon Valley, Inkom	10
Kootenai	Post Falls (4), Coeur d'Alene (3), Haden (2), Rathdrum	10
Elmore	Mountain Home (3), Glenns Ferry	4
Jerome	Jerome	4
Teton	Driggs (2), Victor (2)	4
Bear Lake	Georgetown (2), Montpelier	3
Gooding	Gooding (2), Hagerman	3
Jefferson	Rigby	3
Madison	Rexburg	3
Bonner	Sagle, Sandpoint	2
Caribou	Bancroft, Soda Springs	2
Adams	New Meadows	1
Blaine	Hailey	1
Clearwater	Orofino	1
Custer	Mackay	1
Gem	Emmett	1
Idaho	Riggins	1
Latah	Moscow	1
Lincoln	Shoshone	1
Nez Perce	Lewiston	1
Payette	New Plymouth	1
Washington	Cambridge	1

\*Number in parentheses is the number of instructors from that city. If there is only 1 instructor from a location, parentheses are not used after a city.

### Map. IDLA instructors per county in the state of Idaho



## Recruit & Hire

All IDLA teachers must meet both federal and state compliance standards and have current certification. The applicants' transcripts and education must meet both highly qualified teacher compliance standards as well as IDLA Instructor Expectations (See Appendix ID-1). The applicants' employment history must include prior employment and all HR legislation requirements according to IDAHO CODE 33-1210<sup>2</sup> for employment history/evaluations. The Idaho State Department of Education requires all instructors receive and have background clearance which is tracked by the Idaho State Department of Education's website for clearance and compliance.

While IDLA does not track an applicant's technology access, they do ask that those applicants hired as part-time online instructors provide their own computer and Internet access in order to teach for IDLA. IDLA assesses candidates' teaching experience in an online or blended classroom, as well as the learning management system or tools they have experience using. IDLA keeps track of educators who have completed blended learning training through IDLA as well.

IDLA requires all candidates to complete a rigorous application process via Applitrack.<sup>3</sup> All of their work experience and curriculum vitae/resumes to include letters of reference and work history, a cover letter, application, transcripts, certificate, and highly qualified teacher documentation are captured in this online application site for IDLA's HR recruiting, interviewing, and hiring purposes. IDLA looks for candidates with instructional strategies that would lead to success in the face-to-face classroom or working with Common Core, such as project-based learning, inquiry, differentiation of the curriculum, etc.

To recruit teachers, IDLA advertises on their website<sup>4</sup>, through job sites, and via distributed marketing through Regional Coordinators, principals, and teachers. The most effective recruiting strategy is through word-of-mouth advertising from current teachers and principals. Those who already fill this role know best who would be qualified to serve in this role.

Candidates are screened by the Instructional Manager and members of the Supervision and Operations Teams. Interviews are scheduled based on projected needs for the upcoming school year. Candidates selected for interviews are scheduled for a formal interview hosted in Blackboard Collaborate. In addition to facilitating interviews for candidates at a distance, this also helps assess their tech savvy and presence in a virtual setting. Each interview committee is composed of a member of the Human Resources Team, the Instruction Team, and the Supervision Team.

The same set of questions is posed to each candidate, and the answers are scored from 1-3 on a Google Document by each committee member. At the end of each round of interviews, the committee provides an overall rating for each candidate (ranked A-C) with a recommendation to hire or not hire. Final decisions for hiring are made by the Instructional Manager. Criteria taken into account include the additional number of teachers needed in the content area for the next school year, the recommendation of the interview committee for each candidate, and any references received.

2 <http://legislature.idaho.gov/idstat/Title33/T33CH12SECT33-1210.htm>

3 <http://www.applitrack.com/idla/onlineapp/default.aspx>

4 <http://www.idahodigitallearning.org/AboutUs/Employment.aspx>



An ideal candidate has at least some experience working with a learning management system as a teacher in an online or blended environment. Additionally, candidates should be creative, innovative in their teaching, eager and quick to try new tools and techniques, flexible, available, and a good critical and reflective thinker. IDLA teachers are expected to be masters of their content area and of the teaching practice and willing to adapt something they already do well to deliver through a new medium.

The orientation of teachers through IDLA Human Resources is a lengthy process, as the preparation for teaching incorporates the Student Information System (SIS) and the Infinite Visions System (HR). The SIS includes demographics, education, certification, praxis, and other highly qualified teacher documentation. The Infinite Visions System includes HR documents such as W-4 and I-9 Forms.

## Train & Support

IDLA Professional Development for new teachers consists of content worth five credits:

- IDLA New Teacher Orientation (1 credit asynchronous),
- Summer Conference (1 credit face-to-face), and
- Teaching Online for IDLA (3 credits asynchronous).

All teachers are provided the same scope and sequence of training unless they have a strong background in Blackboard or have previously taught for IDLA. The Orientation course is an orientation to the organization as well as an overview of online learning. The Summer Conference focuses on hands-on training with Blackboard and IDLA's SIS. The Teaching Online for IDLA course reviews critical Blackboard skills needed to teach an online IDLA course, while incorporating best practices, pedagogy, and the IDLA processes and procedures that support each skill. Courses have been adjusted over time to reflect new tools, LMS upgrades, and changes in process and procedure. Training is provided by a facilitator (usually a veteran IDLA Teacher or a Blended Learning Specialist) under the oversight of the Instructional Manager.

In addition to the training opportunities, there is a mentoring program at IDLA. Each content area has a Mentor Teacher who can be a point of contact for new or struggling teachers. The biggest hurdle for new hires is starting up the first course. Even with sandbox courses and training stretching through the summer, some tasks (and the speed at which tasks must be accomplished) can be overwhelming for new teachers in the first few weeks of the first semester. Some of the common issues that come up for new teachers include needing SIS Training. This year IDLA set up a test instance of their SIS to provide a sandbox environment. This system was unavailable for training purposes in previous years. Going through the course start up checklist (See Appendix ID-2), scheduling due dates for the course, and running through procedures for the first time often causes confusion or hold ups as well. After the first full year of teaching online, most instructors are comfortable taking more than one course section per semester.

Beyond new teacher training, IDLA has two additional levels of training. Level 2 advances further the basic technology, best practices, and pedagogy learned in Level 1. Level 3 includes differentiated topics targeted to teacher professional growth goals (master teacher, course developer, blended learning, etc.). (See Appendix ID-3 for graphics used to illustrate the teacher levels and continuum for teacher development.) Teachers are required to complete one course every 15 months. All courses are offered with a PD credit option for those who want to use the training credits for recertification. IDLA provides the training and a facilitator. The Instructional Manager oversees all PD facilitators.

To provide additional teacher support, IDLA established PLCs. The first iteration was a summer book club hosted by IDLA's Professional Development and Blended Implementation Specialist in a Google+ Community. Teachers read the same book and share thoughts, reflect, and discuss ideas for practice both synchronously and asynchronously. Current goals are to continue the book club through Fall and Spring of 2014-15, have Mentor Teachers host the Google+ Community within each of their content areas, and begin to foster the community needed to provide a PLC within each content area.

## Evaluate

IDLA evaluates their teachers approximately once every three weeks by looking at a variety of data points, including but not limited to the following:

- synchronous instruction,
- announcements,
- gradecenter feedback.
- communication.
- intervention,
- student and parent evaluations,
- student pass rate,
- professional development, and
- asynchronous instruction.

Full-time and part-time teachers do not follow the same evaluation process. The process for the full-time teacher evaluation starts with the principals reviewing the class prior to the start of the semester to ensure it is ready to go and reviewing classes at least once every 10 days until the end of the course; a formal "Walkthrough" is conducted approximately every three weeks. This evaluation reviews items within the course, as well as communications and teacher efforts documented in IDLA's SIS. A final "Walkthrough" (evaluation) is conducted after the end of the class. Teachers may earn bonus pay based upon meeting appropriate criteria. This criterion is available in a rubric that IDLA built themselves using the iNACOL National Standards for Quality Online Teaching as well as the IDLA online teaching standards<sup>6</sup>.

Evaluation is used in part for promotion in that it is used to determine bonus pay and preferential teaching assignments. Student performance and feedback are both used to determine bonus pay. Expectations for communicating with students consist of 24-hour turnaround on email and phone call correspondence, and 72 hours for grading. Bonus pay is also provided for quick feedback on assignments. To recognize their stellar teachers, IDLA shares positive comments from parents, students, and site coordinators across the organization. Also, they recognize Teachers of the Year by content areas annually.

### Retain

IDLA retains 90% of their teachers each year. IDLA instructors must meet specific criteria to remain compliant, including Principal Evaluation Rubrics, Student Pass Rates, HR and HQT Document Compliance, and PD Compliance. IDLA HR and the Supervision Team meet quarterly and determine who is in or out of compliance. In these meetings, staff identify if the part-time instructor needs to receive coaching, letters, or be terminated. As a team, both HR and supervision track the following using IV (finance data) and SIS (student information data):

1. Supervision Evaluations;
2. Letters of Encouragement, Warning, and Termination;
3. Bonus Compensations; and
4. In-State vs. Out-of-State Residency.

There are some challenges that IDLA faces when it comes to retaining teachers. Sometimes workload conflicts between IDLA course assignments and face-to-face instruction pose issues. Teachers may have a change in lifestyle or other commitments they have outside of education, which may cause them to need to step away. IDLA has lost a few teachers each year due to their inability to meet minimum expectations or performance requirements, but they maintain a very low turnover overall each year. Some teachers find the workload to be more than they expected. Another challenge is unplanned health issues. IDLA instructors expressed that the incentives to stay with IDLA include receiving competitive income, cultivating beneficial relationships within the IDLA community, being involved with 21st century teaching opportunities, having the opportunity to engage in various professional development, and collaborating and networking with their peers.

## Appendix ID-I

### IDLA Instructor Expectations 2014-2015

- Courses classified as custom sections may have minimum requirements adjusted according to local needs and as determined by the principal and local needs. A removal of criteria will remove the number of points in the bonus divisor.
- Bonus Criteria - Instructors must meet minimum teaching requirements and earn 70% (16.1 of 23) of eligible bonus criteria to be eligible to receive the bonus.

### Administrative Requirements

#### Meets Expectations

1. The instructor follows procedures as outlined in the IDLA Employee Handbook.
2. The instructor adheres to the Code of Ethics for Idaho Professional Educators. In the event of violation of professional conduct, IDLA is required by Idaho Code to report the violation to the Executive Committee of the Professional Standards Commission.
3. IDLA's Acceptable Use Policy is enforced. In the event of a violation of acceptable online behavior, the instructor immediately notifies the student's site coordinator and IDLA online principal.
4. Reports and documentation are submitted in a timely manner, including progress (grade) reports and final grades, according to the posted IDLA calendar, or within 4 days of course completion.
5. The instructor logs in to the course regularly (5 days per week), and demonstrates their presence via announcements, discussion board participation, grading, answering email, etc. During extension periods, the instructor may deviate from this schedule, but must communicate changes to students.
6. The instructor is available to students at regular intervals throughout the week. This can be accomplished by using synchronous tools, instant messaging, phone, etc.
7. The instructor ensures instructional modifications required by a special education student's Individual Education Plan (IEP) or 504, as communicated from IDLA's Special Education Coordinator by site coordinator, are being met.
8. The instructor updates all relevant communication entries weekly in the SIS—including office ("live instructor") or Academic Help Center hours, phone calls, emails, chats, and IM's to students, parents and site coordinators.
9. The principal receives no more than two (2) Overdue Action Alerts on the instructor.
10. The Instructor assesses student work accurately according to the assignment guidelines, and/or scoring rubrics.
11. The course is reviewed, prior to the start of class to ensure that: a) course units properly deploy content and weblinks, b) the instructor information link contains accurate instructor and principal contact information, as well as availability to meet with students, c) course syllabi (both the webpage and the print version) are updated, reflecting accurate contact information, late work policies and alternate DB information, d) assignments receiving personal feedback are identified, and, e) assignment due dates are updated in the Gradecenter and Course Unit pages.
12. The instructor maintains compliance with any modifications made to the course (The IDLA Curriculum Manager is responsible for maintaining compliance with fair use and copyright law, using citations and obtaining permission where appropriate in course development).
13. Scheduled instructor absences from the course are posted in announcements, and emailed to students, in a timely manner.

## Announcements

### Meets Expectations

1. The instructor posts two (2) announcements in the course weekly (at least two every 7 days). Announcements contain information about assignments, where to find feedback, due dates, exams and any other pertinent information. Announcements are engaging, utilize variety, are motivational and encouraging.
2. Announcements provide instructional focus that go beyond due dates and general information and set the stage for future learning, including connecting students to previous knowledge, providing supplementary material to deepen and extend learning, and/or responding to unique needs of the learners in the classroom.
3. The instructor models and creates a culture of academic writing. This includes requiring students to respond with fully-developed thoughts, which demonstrate a command of the conventions of standard English grammar, usage, capitalization, punctuation, and spelling when writing.

### Exceeds Expectations

- (1 pt) The instructor creates and inserts a brief, personal podcast, videocast, voice announcement or interactivity into each course unit to set the stage for future learning, or to reinforce content.

### Clarifications/Guidelines/Interpretations

- “Personalized” announcements do not require that the teacher create an audio/video/interactive. Rather, the teacher may:  
a) create an AV that uses their voice/video, or b) “frame” or personalize a 3rd party audio/video/interactive using text.

## Course and Curriculum

### Meets Expectations

1. The instructor reports any course and/or curriculum concerns to support@idla.k12.id.us in a timely manner.
2. The instructor models and creates a culture of academic writing. This includes requiring students to respond with fully-developed thoughts, which demonstrate a command of the conventions of standard English grammar, usage, capitalization, punctuation, and spelling when writing.
3. The Instructor requires students to support their responses with examples from course content, reading, or other curricular material.

### Exceeds Expectations

- (1 pt) Working with the content development team, the instructor significantly revises or improves components of the online course, and/or creates and integrates pre-approved learning objects or interactives into the current course. The Instructor's modification(s) to the curriculum/course must be approved by the Curriculum Manager and may be added to the master course.

### Clarifications/Guidelines/Interpretations

- Approved curriculum bonus points will be added to the final WT by a member of the Instructional Management team.

## Grading and Grade Center Feedback

### Meets Expectations

1. Regular class assignments are graded within 72 hours (3 days). Longer course assignments, projects, course papers, and extended narratives are graded within 96 hours (4 days), as arranged in collaboration with the class principal.
2. Students receive acknowledgement from the instructor relating to assignments not submitted through the LMS within 24 hrs.
3. At least one assignment in each unit receives specific, detailed, and individualized feedback that addresses both content and literacy practices. Feedback may include the use of scoring rubrics, but must also include comment(s) on areas of strength and/or areas in need of improvement. Individualized feedback is professional, positive, personal, and encouraging.
4. The instructor models and creates a culture of academic writing. This includes requiring students to respond with fully-developed thoughts, which demonstrate a command of the conventions of standard English grammar, usage, capitalization, punctuation, and spelling when writing.
5. Assignment(s) receiving feedback are marked with an "\*" in the gradebook assignment name, and/or communicated to students via the announcements and course units area(s) of the course.

### Exceeds Expectations

1. (2 pts) All students receive specific, detailed, and individualized feedback on two (2) or more assignments in each unit. Feedback may include the use of scoring rubrics, but must also include a comment on areas of strength and/or areas in need of improvement. Individualized feedback is professional, positive, personal, and encouraging.
2. (2 pts) Tests, assignments and/or projects, receiving a score less than 70%, receive specific, detailed, and individualized feedback. Feedback provided addresses both content and literacy practices and may include the use of scoring rubrics, but must also include comment(s) on areas of strength and/or areas in need of improvement. Individualized feedback is professional, positive, personal, and encouraging.

3. (2 pts) Assignments are consistently graded within 48 hours (2 days) of submission, OR,
4. (4 pts) Assignments are consistently graded within 24 hours (1 day) of submission.
  - a. \*\* Note: Automated feedback for objective assessments is not included in this rubric.
  - b. \*\* Note: A maximum of 6 pts per wt may be earned in this area.

### Clarifications/Guidelines/Interpretations

- Meets & Bonus: either auto-graded- or teacher-graded assignments can receive specific feedback.
- Bonus: below 70% assignments require feedback for ALL assignments (both teacher-graded and auto-graded) to earn bonus.

## Asynchronous Communications & Collaboration

### Meets Expectations

1. The instructor is present and participates in all asynchronous communication activities (discussion boards, wikis, blogs, and voice boards) and takes an active role (at least 3 days per week) in creating a dynamic community that furthers participants' involvement with ideas, concepts, and classmates. Inappropriate student posts are addressed immediately. The instructor's presence is professional, personable, and pleasant. The instructor uses a variety of approaches to move the discussion forward and to engage participants.
2. The instructor grades student responses on the use of academic and domain-specific words and phrases in discussion posts, blogs, and wikis.
3. The instructor models and creates a culture of academic writing. This includes requiring students to respond with fully-developed thoughts, which demonstrate a command of the conventions of standard English grammar, usage, capitalization, punctuation, and spelling when writing.

### Exceeds Expectations

1. (1 pt) The instructor is proactive in discussions, effectively encourages extended conversations, and/or respectfully challenges student posts.
2. (1 pt) The instructor uses questioning techniques and/or reframes the discussion to extend the topic.

## Communication

### Meets Expectations

1. The instructor makes initial contact with students within the first 48 hours (2 days) of class, and maintains contact with students a minimum of three (3) times per week (via email, discussion board, phone, instant message, text message, web conference, announcements, etc.).
2. During the course, the instructor makes at least two (2) home (student and/or parent) phone contacts regarding each student, including one (1) phone contact during the first week of class. Documentation of all phone calls and relevant course communication with students, parents, site coordinators, and designated personnel are recorded weekly in the SIS. Information not archived in the SIS must be available for review upon request.
3. For any student whose grade is below 70% for two (2) consecutive progress reports, initial phone contact is made to either the parent or the site coordinator via the preferred communication method for the recipient. Initial phone contact should be made with the student's parent, and if unresponsive, secondary phone contact should be made to the site coordinator (Phone messages are to be documented in the SIS). Phone contact is required within three (3) days of progress reports; however, communication is not required by the instructor for any student who has documented parent or site coordinator communication indicating the student has no intention of completing the course.
4. The instructor responds to communications, phone calls or emails from students, site coordinators, parents, online principal, IDLA staff, and other stakeholders within 24 hours (1 day)-including during any extension period.
5. The instructor assists in resolving legitimate complaints from students, site coordinators, parents, online principal, IDLA staff, and other stakeholders in a positive manner and provides necessary documentation within 24 hours (1 day).
6. The instructor models and creates a culture of academic writing. This includes requiring students to respond with fully-developed thoughts, which demonstrate a command of the conventions of standard English grammar, usage, capitalization, punctuation, and spelling when writing.

### Exceeds Expectations

1. (1pt) Instructor holds an open house, welcoming students and parents, within the first two weeks of class, via Idaho Live and emails all parents a copy of the course syllabus and Student/Parent Handbook.
2. (1pt) Instructor provides parents a detailed mid-term progress report comprised of a gradebook report and/or course statistics, or a mid-term conference via phone call, f2f meeting, or Idaho Live.



## Synchronous Instruction

### Meets Expectations

1. The instructor serves 1 hour per week in the Academic Help Center, or holds 1 office (“live instructor”) hour per week in IDAHO LIVE and documents each session in the SIS.
2. The instructor supports, advertises, and communicates relevant synchronous events, including office (“live instructor”) hours, lectures, and guest speakers via course announcements and emails.

### Exceeds Expectations

1. (1 pt per event) The instructor facilitates and/or presents a pre-approved event, lecture, book talk, guest speaker..., that is available and beneficial across the respective content area, or the instructor facilitates/presents an event, lecture, class discussion, book talk, live speech, guest speaker, or class review for their own class. The archive of any event must be made available in the class for students to view at a later time.
2. (1 pt) The instructor serves an additional hour (in addition to the required weekly office hour) in the Academic Help Center during school hours (between the hours of 7 - 6pm mst, M-F), or on Sunday evenings (between 3:00mst and 10:00mst).
  - a. Note: Live events are not to be held in the Academic Help Center.
  - b. Note: A maximum of 4 pts may be earned in this area.

### Clarifications/Guidelines/Interpretations

- Only content-wide Live Events must be pre-approved by the Instruction Team. Bonus pts will be added to final WT.
- MINIMUM: 1-hour office hr required regardless of number of sections taught or content areas (multiple courses could be available through teachers’ Office Hours).
- BONUS: If a teacher is teaching 2 different content areas, they must serve 1 hr in each AHC content area to earn the bonus. This earns them the bonus for Synchronous Instruction for both classes.

## Intervention

### Meets Expectations

- The instructor accepts for the entire length of the course, all late assignments for at least 50% of value. This includes alternatives to discussion boards in cases where the student has not participated in a timely manner. This policy is communicated to students through the course syllabus and in the first week's announcements.

### Exceeds Expectations

1. (1 pt) The instructor alters the course (curriculum, pacing, and/or assignments). Modifications are documented in the student information system.
2. (1 pt) The instructor provides instruction or communication that exceed minimum requirements (eg., individual student tutoring sessions). Modifications are documented in the student information system.

### Clarifications/Guidelines/Interpretations

- Text a Tutor: 2hrs = 1 office hr (min), 2 hrs in AHC = 1 AHC (bonus); alternate DB assignments do not count for this.

## Professional Development

### Meets Expectations

1. The instructor attends the full IDLA summer instructor training conference annually.
2. The instructor successfully completes an approved online professional development course during the 15 months prior to the course end date. Approved course lists will be provided to instructors through IDLA's Instructional Manager, OR, serves as a Curriculum Lead/ instructor Mentor for IDLA.

### Exceeds Expectations

- (1 pt) The instructor has completed an approved Professional Development course or activity in the previous 15 months prior to the course end date. Non-IDLA professional development courses must be aligned to Idaho Online Teaching Standards or iNACOL Standards for Quality Online Teaching.
- (1 pt) The instructor attends (or views the archive), three (3) Just In Time (JIT) trainings in the previous 15 months from the course end date.

### Clarifications/Guidelines/Interpretations

- JITs must be submitted by the final day of class (End of day on Friday of the final exam week) for points to be eligible for that session.

### Student Evaluations

#### Exceeds Expectations

- (1pt) Student end of course evaluation survey scores are greater than 4 (on a scale of 1 - 6).

### Parent Evaluations

#### Exceeds Expectations

- (1pt) Parent end of course evaluation survey scores are greater than 4 (on a scale of 1 - 6).

### Student Achievement

#### Exceeds Expectations

- (1pt) The successful completion rate meets or exceeds the historic pass rate for this specific course (if a course has been run 3 or fewer times, the content area historic pass rate is to be utilized).

## Appendix ID-2

### Course Start-up Checklist

#### Before your new course begins, make sure you have the following completed...

- Set your progress report dates in the SIS (These will not be editable once the course begins without contacting your principal)
- Use Set Grade Center Due Dates (in your Blackboard course under Course Tools) to set due dates for each assignment
- Post information in the Instructor Info Tab
  - Post your information (including a picture or image), as well as Office Hours
  - Please also post principal contact information here as well
- Post a Welcome Announcement – Possible Topics:
  - Class drop deadline
  - Tech Support phone number
  - Course Schedule
  - Live office hours/tutoring
- Update both the onscreen and printable version of the Course Syllabus
  - Your contact info, office hours, etc
  - Add your principal's information from the Instructor Info tab
  - Ensure all information within the syllabus is up-to-date
  - Re-post the printable version
- Update the course schedule with correct unit date range (onscreen and printable versions)
- Update due dates in the Unit Checklists (onscreen only)
- Check Course Units
  - Preview Course Unit content
  - Check to see that all links, videos, and attachments work
  - Make Unit 1 available
  - Set remaining Course Units to become available corresponding to dates in the Course Schedule
- Add \* to Grade Center Assignments for which you will add comments
- Add link to IdahoLive Room
- Send a Welcome Email to your class **\*no earlier than the day before classes start**

**For Dual Credit Courses:**

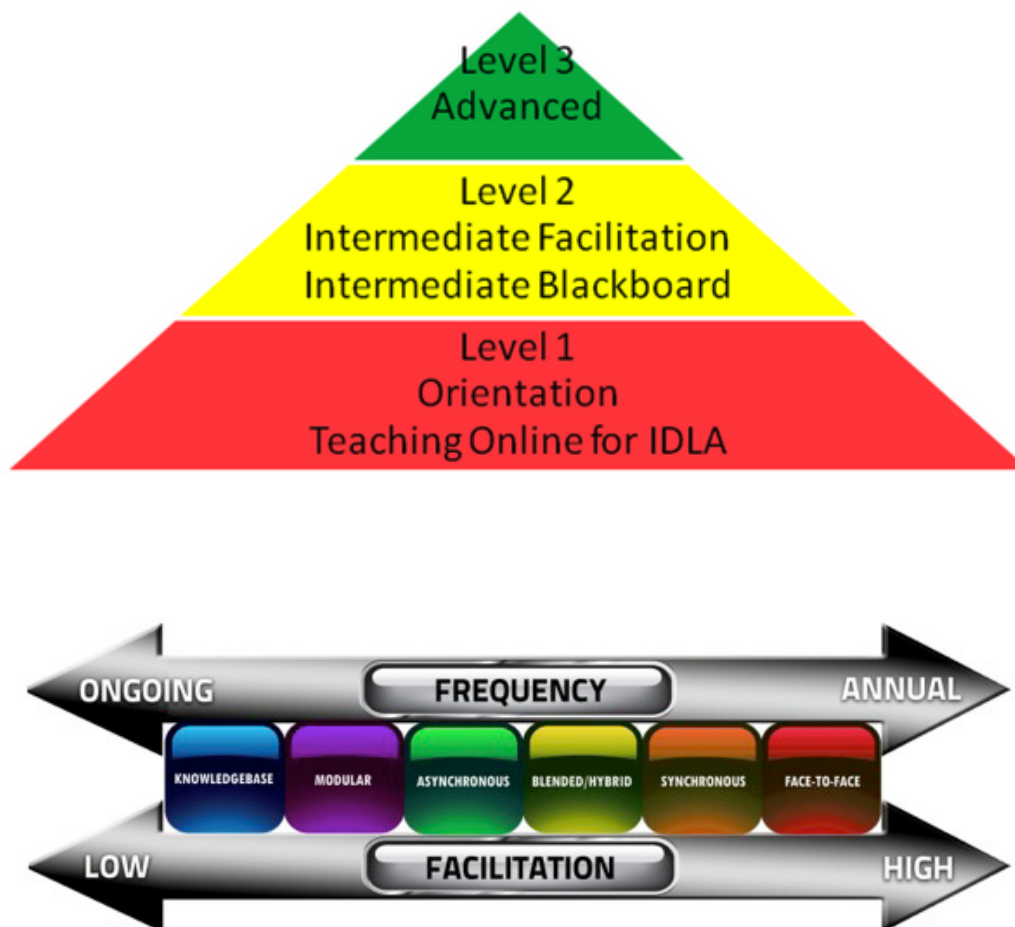
- Provide college credit info (should be in Syllabus/Schedule link)
- Provide textbook info

**For Ap Courses:**

- Encourage students to register for AP exam

## Appendix ID-3

### Teacher Levels & Continuum For Teacher Development



# Illinois Virtual School

## KEY FEATURES

Illinois Virtual School (IVS) instructional staff are used when additional tasks (depending on their availability and expertise), such as redeveloping courses, mentoring new teachers, and designing new curriculum are needed.

IVS implemented Teaching Online 101, a course that candidates have to complete before being considered. After an online interview, IVS also enrolls candidates in their LMS to see if candidates have technical skills.

A single mentor teacher who has been teaching with IVS for about 12 years works with each of the new hires throughout their first year.

Teachers report on a Communication Plan for connecting with students: giving out general information, reporting student progress, providing instruction for students, and connecting with schools. This information is shared with schools so that they know what to expect from students' online teachers.

## Introduction

Illinois Virtual School "is the Illinois State Board of Education's Statewide Virtual School. The IVS program is designed to allow students who are enrolled in a public or private school to supplement their education by taking courses that are educationally appropriate. The IVS program is administered through the Peoria County Regional Office of Education, a member of the Illinois Association of Regional Superintendents of Schools (IARSS). The Peoria ROE was awarded the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) contract to manage and operate the Illinois Virtual School (IVS) on April 1, 2009. For the past 13 years, ISBE's virtual program (IVHS and now IVS) has provided leadership to accelerate the adoption and use of online learning within Illinois. Working in partnership with public and private schools, IVS offers classes to students and professional development programs for educators. IVS provides:

- Opportunities for students to take *full service courses* not offered by their face-to-face school, such as Advanced Placement, foreign languages, and other enrichment opportunities;
- Flexibility in scheduling;
- *Credit recovery options* for students to graduate on time; and
- Individualized instruction that occurs anytime, anywhere, and *any pace* through teacher-managed courses.

IVS provides schools and students a Completion Certificate that includes a suggested final grade and percent. The local school determines the final grade that is added to the official transcript for the student. Since IVS partners —not competes—with schools, the local school retains their students and is able to offer expanded learning opportunities.”<sup>1</sup>

IVS is managed by a staff of eight, including the Director, Director of Operations, Coordinator of Professional Development (who manages the state-level educational opportunities for educators), Coordinator of Curriculum, LMS & SIS Specialist, Technical Support Lead, Course Builder, and Operations Assistant.

IVS Instructional Staff

IVS has 55 instructors divided up among departments. Most teachers have one to two course assignments, the equivalent to 60-70 students, depending on teacher availability, track record, and the intensity of the course content. Pay is based on student enrollments. Instead of having lead teachers or department heads, they have instructional staff take on additional tasks, such as redeveloping courses, mentoring new teachers, and designing new curriculum, depending on their availability. When this is possible, the instructors are given an addendum to their contract for the additional tasks. All IVS instructors are part-time and include teachers that teach face-to-face in a traditional brick-and-mortar setting, as well as stay-at-home parents and retired teachers. Their teacher names, subjects they teach, and their email addresses are shared with the public via IVS’s website and are categorized by department. When a teacher is hired, IVS keeps a folder that holds all of their licenses, other credentials, and forms. Each teacher has an Illinois Educator Identification Number (IEIN), which allows IVS to go into the state system and see that their teachers are keeping up with their licenses, etc., allowing IVS to make sure that the teachers teaching their courses are in fact qualified to teach the subject area.

An online survey was administered to instructors using a survey tool called Opinio. The data is shared below. Out of the 49 respondents who completed the survey, 75.5% are female. Table 1 shows the breakdown of the ethnicity of the staff, while Table 2 shows their educational background.

Table 1. Ethnicity

Ethnicity	Frequency	Percentage
Hispanic or Latino	2	4.1%
Black or African American	2	4.1%
American Indian or Alaska Native	-	-
Asian	-	-
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	-	-
White	45	91.8%

1 <http://www.ilvirtual.org/about-ivs/about-ivs>



**Table 2. Highest degree earned**

Degree	Frequency	Percentage
Bachelor's degree	9	18.4%
Master's degree	36	73.5%
Professional degree – Ed.S.	1	2.0%
Doctorate degree – Ph.D., Ed.D., M.D.	3	6.1%

The median number of classes teachers have taken online for a degree and/or professional development purposes is eight courses (with a maximum number of 100 and a minimum of zero). When asked if they had ever been a face-to-face teacher, 100% said yes. When asked if they taught face-to-face currently, 53% said yes. Table 3 shows the grade levels that the instructional staff is teaching/has taught face-to-face. Table 4 shows the subjects that the instructors have taught/are currently teaching face-to-face.

**Table 3. Grade levels taught face-to-face**

Grade Levels	Frequency	Percentage
K-2	4	8.3%
3-5	6	12.5%
6-8	24	50.0%
9-12	47	97.9%
Higher Ed	19	39.6%

**Table 4. Subjects taught face-to-face**

Subject	Frequency
English	16
World Languages	17
Math	11
Science	5
Social Studies	16
Other*	18

\* Other – Music, Business, Literacy, Technology, Art, Health, Career and Technical Education, Latin American Studies, Computer Science

The staff's median years of teaching online was 8 years with a minimum of one year and a maximum of 18 years. When asked how many years they had been teaching at IVS specifically, the median was 7.5 years, maximum 15 years, and minimum one year. Table 5 shows the grade levels that instructional staff is teaching or has taught online. Table 6 shows the subjects that the instructors have taught/are currently teaching online.

**Table 5. Grade levels taught online**

Grade Levels	Frequency	Percentage
K-2	-	-
3-5	-	-
6-8	15	30.6%
9-12	48	97.9%
Higher Ed	7	14.3%

**Table 6. Subjects taught online**

Subject	Frequency
English	8
World Languages	16
Math	7
Science	5
Social Studies	12
Other*	13

\* Other – Music, Business, Education, Teacher Professional Development, Parenting, Technology, AP Economics, Health, Art History, Career and Technical Education

The majority of the instructors are located in Illinois. Table 7 illustrates the counties in which the teachers reside. Two teachers reported that they live outside of Illinois, within the following cities and states: Naples, Florida, and Highland, Indiana.

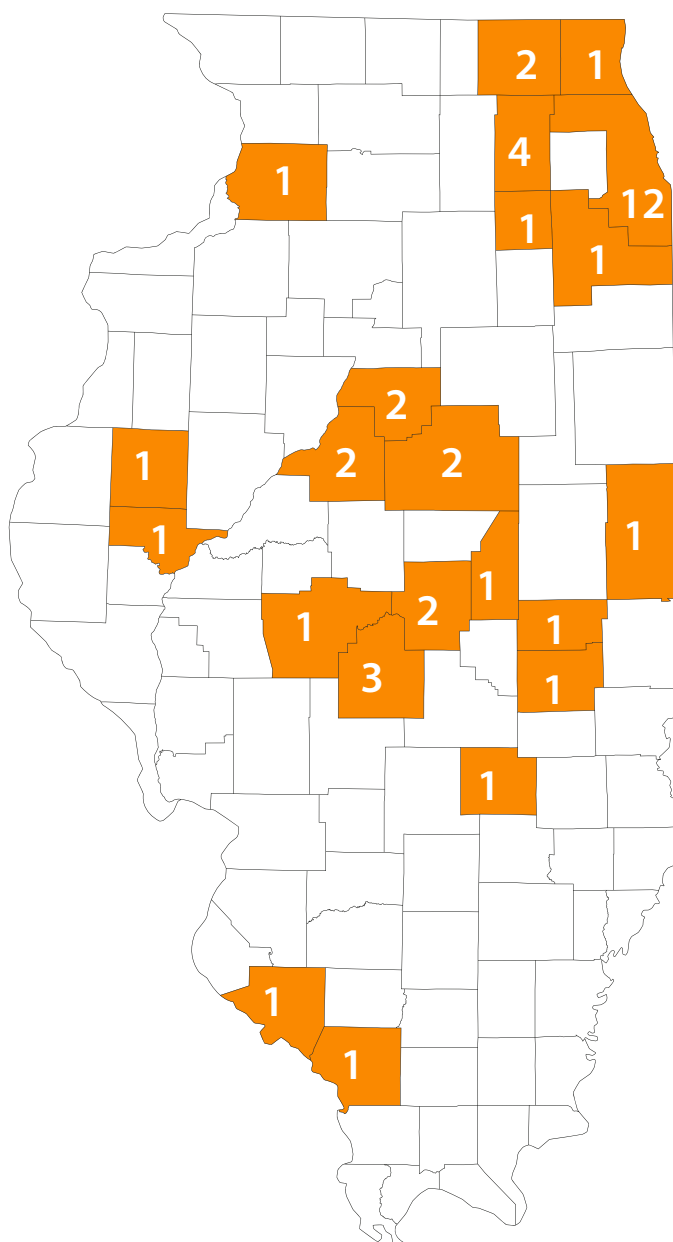
**Table 7. Instructor locations in Illinois by county (ordered by high to low frequency)**

County (IL)	Cities	# of Instructors
Cook	Chicago (2), Chicago Heights (2), Country Club Hills, La Grange Park, Lemont, Norridge, Palos Heights, Park Ridge, Schaumburg, Streamwood	12
Kane	St. Charles (2), Batavia, Geneva	4
Christian	Pana (2), Edinburg	3
DuPage	Downers Grove	2
Macon	Decatur, Maroa	2
McHenry	Harvard	2
McLean	Bloomington, Heyworth	2
Tazewell	Morton	2
Woodford	Metamora	2
Coles	Ashmore	1
Douglas	Newman	1
Effingham	Effingham	1
Jackson	Carbondale	1
Kendall	Newark	1
Lake	Lake Zurich	1
McDonough	Macomb	1
Piatt	Monticello	1
Randolph	Sparta	1
Sangamon	Springfield	1
Schuyler	Rushville	1
Vermilion	Sidell	1
Whiteside	Prophetstown	1
Will	Lockport	1

\*Number in parentheses is the number of instructors from that city. If there is only 1 instructor from a location, parentheses are not used after a city.

The following map shows the instructors' distribution per county across the state of Illinois.

**Map. IVS instructors per county in the state of Illinois**



## Recruit & Hire

Instructor employment opportunities are posted to the Illinois Education Job Bank hosted by the Illinois Association of School Administrators. IVS also utilizes its current instructors to recommend potential candidates. In 2013, they implemented a new process, requiring teacher candidates to complete Teaching Online 101 first. This course is self-paced and takes approximately 10 hours to complete. Lead Teachers are the facilitators/coaches for the course. There are five modules: the first one covers online learning in general; the second is about the virtual instructor and how the role differs from a traditional face-to-face teaching position; the third deals with time management; the fourth explains establishing rapport with the students; the final module is about feedback and giving appropriate and substantial amounts of it. A link to apply for IVS instructional positions is provided at the end of the course.

Within the application, candidates provide their IEIN, how many years they have been teaching online, how many years they have been teaching in general, their highest degree, and their employment history. They are also asked to rank their mastery of a series of technology skills. Once the application is complete, IVS matches content area needs with potential instructors. The next step is scheduling an online pre-interview in Lync. IVS provides the candidate information about IVS in order to ease the stress of the interview. At this time, the candidate is asked to submit a resume and three references. Concurrently, IVS conducts a background check utilizes both the Illinois and United States databases. The candidates teaching credentials are also verified.

The two purposes of this phase of the interview are to get a first impression of the candidate through questions, answers, and scenarios; to share information about IVS; and to outline the actual role of the IVS teachers. They also have a document they use during the interview process called "Qualities of a Successful Online Instructor" that they expect their teaching staff to possess:

- Are they visible?
- Are they organized?
- Are they highly motivated?
- Are they enthusiastic?
- Are they committed to teaching?
- Do they possess a philosophy that supports student-centered learning?
- Do they demonstrate creativity?
- Are they responsive to students' needs?
- Are they good at managing time? and
- Are they reinforcing of student expectations?

At the end of this interview, IVS staff shares their thoughts with the candidate, letting him/her know if the teacher is a good fit and making sure that the candidate feels it will be a good fit as well. If both agree.

IVS enrolls the candidate in a Sandbox, which is a supportive space for the candidates to learn more about Desire2Learn, IVS's learning management system (LMS). A set of 11 lessons helps the candidate learn about the LMS, including but not limited to introduction to Desire2Learn, and getting to know the calendar, the news tool, how to maintain content, how to manage students and discussions, providing feedback in the dropbox, grading quizzes, adding content, and managing the course. Once the candidate is familiar with the content in the Sandbox, IVS creates a demo course for the one that the candidate would potentially be teaching, and he/she uses the demo to apply what he/she has learned. Questions go to the Coordinator of Professional Development Services. Then IVS assesses the candidate's technology skills. Seeing the teacher as a student helps reviewers see how the candidate can help students with tech issues. Following satisfactory performance throughout the process, the candidate is offered a one-year contract and given a course assignment. The teacher is also fingerprinted.

### **Train & Support**

After hire, webinar trainings begin in the student information system, including how to access the student list, contact information, etc. New instructors are assigned an experienced mentor who is one of the instructors that has been teaching the longest with IVS. This mentor works with new instructors throughout their first year. The instructor can go to the mentor with questions and problems. The mentor sets up webinars as open forums around certain topics of interest for new teachers, but then she also opens the floor up for any pressing issues that have not been covered. Some common challenges new teachers face include getting students started in the course, solving platform issues, using Dropbox, and assessing discussion boards. According to IVS, it typically takes the new teachers one year to become comfortable.

IVS reports to the state all of the professional development that they provide their teachers. They conduct quarterly professional development web conferences in the evening; the topics are pre-determined based on needs or align with issues that are timely. IVS also offers a three-day, face-to-face summer professional development event; sometimes they do a one-day session on a Saturday in the winter. Communication was the topic for the summer 2014 three-day professional development event with the focus on effective strategies and new tools. The culminating activity for the teachers was to create a communication plan for the year. This session was also a way for teachers to come together and revamp curriculum. Teachers were put into teams and participated in game-like activities so they could collaborate on curriculum restructuring.

At the beginning of the Fall, Spring, and Summer school sessions, the technical working group delivers information about any upgrades to the systems that the teachers are using. These sessions are done virtually and teachers are highly encouraged to participate because attendance counts towards professional development units that will help them maintain their license. There is also a "Teacher Resources" module that all teachers can contribute to and learn from. Starting this year, in addition to the tech session, the departments will hold department meetings.

## Evaluate

Teacher contracts delineate expectations for the teachers in terms of the roles they play in the online learning environment, including but not limited to the following:

- Logging into the learning platform at least every other day.
- Showing presence in the classroom.
- Maintaining grade book.
- Communicating with students and staff.
- Completing initial student contact at the start of the term.
- Reaching out to at-risk, struggling students.
- Participating actively (quarterly meetings, professional development).

These items are logged in the Instructor Participation Report. (See sample Instructor Participation Report in Appendix IL-1). They also ask that teachers use the Communication Plan (See Appendix IL-2) and be responsible for five key items:

- Connecting with students;
- Giving out general information;
- Reporting student progress;
- Providing instruction for students; and
- Connecting with schools.

The teachers have to report on what activities they will do, what tools they will use, and with what frequency they will implement this communication plan. This communication plan is shared with schools so staff knows what to expect for their students. Teachers are asked to keep a weekly communication log in a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet. IVS will share this data with their state board of education.

Each year, IVS collects three data points (in December, April, and July) for their instructors as part of the evaluation process. These three data points include student enrollments (how many students the teacher had in the course), what communication teachers had with the students, and how successful the students were. The data points also include how many days the teachers logged into the learning platform and how many times the teachers were actively involved with professional development and IVS administrative-related activities. This report is a concrete evaluation tool for the Director of Operations. It is also an effective conversation piece for the teachers and a reflection on their work at IVS. This approach does not assign a label or category in which a teacher would be placed, such as “successful,” “satisfactory,” or “needs improvement.” Instead, this is a subtle approach to constructive evaluation where the school works together with the teacher to improve his/her concrete effectiveness in his/her teaching role at IVS. An end-of-course survey is used to gather student feedback and is reported to the state in terms of the students’ satisfaction; however, it is not included in the teacher evaluation process. Additionally, the evaluation expectations require teachers to answer students who have emailed or called them within 24 hours, and graded assignments are expected to be returned to students within two to three days (including weekends).

### Retain

At IVS, most of their teachers stay on from year to year. Only 10 instructors have left since IVS has been in operation. Staff attribute retention to having an approachable administrative staff and offering teachers multiple lines of support. It is a culture of community that they foster while the teachers are helping and supporting each other. IVS is thinking about implementing a five-year teaching award. Currently there are no formal means for recognizing stellar performance of teachers; however, they do “shout-outs” at the start of the school term to recognize teachers’ efforts and recognize instructors with gift bags and tokens of appreciation at the face-to-face meetings over the summer. They also hold after-hour socials and a sit-down dinner at the annual meeting.



## Appendix IL-3

### Sample Instructor Participation Report

Lastname, Firstname - FY14 Data Points

#### EMAIL COMMUNICATIONS and COMPLETION RATE

*Identified Non-Starters email was not sent for the June Terms.*

	Enrollments	Completion Rate	Welcome Email Sent	Identified Non-Starters	Enrollments Confirmed
8/22/2013	4	100	Yes		
9/5/2013	3	100	Yes		
9/17/2013	0	NA	NA		
10/15/2013	3	100	Yes		
11/5/2013	1	100	Yes		
12/3/2013	2	100	Yes		
1/7/2014	3	100	Yes		
1/22/2014	1		Yes		
2/20/2014	3		Yes		
3/18/2014	1		Yes		
4/3/2014	6		Yes		
5/8/2014	4		Yes		
6/5/2014	8		Yes		
6/19/2014	6		Yes		

#### COURSE MANAGEMENT

##### *Days logged in D2L*

September 2013:	29	January 2014:	30	May 2014:	28
October 2013:	30	February 2014:	26	June 2014:	29
November 2013:	28	March 2014:	27	July 2014:	31
December 2013:	29	April 2014:	26		

#### ACTIVE PARTICIPATION IN FACULTY MEETINGS

<i>Date</i>	<i>Topic</i>	<i>Participation</i>
11/21/2013	Overview FY14	Attended
1/29/2014	Email Transition	Attended
4/14/2014	D2L Upgrade	Attended
4/26/2014	F2F	Attended
5/7/2014	D2L Upgrade	Attended
5/14/2014	D2L Upgrade	Didn't Attend
7/22/2014	F2F	Attended
7/23/2014	F2F	Attended
7/24/2014	F2F	Attended

# Appendix IL-4

## Communication Plan

Purpose of the Communication Plan is to have a way of sharing with students, parents/guardians, and schools what to expect as far as communication from the teacher. The plan focuses of five “purposes” for communication.

- 1. Connecting with Students
- 2. General Information
- 3. Reporting Student Progress
- 4. Instructional Support
- 5. Connecting with Schools

Under each purpose please identify/describe how you communicate with students, parents/guardians, and/or schools (activity), the tool you will use for this communication (tool), and identify when and/or in what situation(s) you will use the communication strategy (frequency).

This document will be available in D2L and shared on our website. Please make sure it is “public” ready when submitting it to the dropbox. Remember that not everyone will understand teacher lingo : )

Caution: When possible, describe the circumstance instead of using “When Needed” in the frequency column. What would need to happen for it to be needed?

### Sample Activities:

Connecting with Students:		
<b>Activities</b> Student will receive an Initial Pager Greeting when s/he logs in to class.	<b>Tool</b> Pager	<b>Frequency</b> Once, tool use is on-going
General Information:		
<b>Activities</b> News tool will be used to provide general information, updates, changes, etc. about course and due dates.  Teacher will send out Twitter updates	<b>Tool</b> News Widget  Twitter	<b>Frequency</b> Weekly  Reminder of deadlines, special announcements, etc...

Reporting Student Progress:		
<b>Activities</b> Students will receive a personalized missing work report each month that lists all missing assignments for the term.	<b>Tool</b> MAESTRO Email	<b>Frequency</b> Once per month
Instructional Support:		
<b>Activities</b> Teacher will provide any additional instructional support that is requested by students.  Students will receive reminders and tips.  Students will have opportunities to ask individual questions and discuss concerns.	<b>Tool</b> Phone, email, news item  News, Email  Email, Text, Phone, Web-conferencing	<b>Frequency</b> Instructional support is provided for on-going and just-in-time bases throughout the class.  As needed On-going  Upon student request
Connecting with Schools:		
<b>Activities</b> School personnel are invited to attend an Open House at the start of each term.	<b>Tool</b> Web-conference	<b>Frequency</b> Within the first two weeks of the term

The Communication Plan is one piece of documentation that will be shared with districts partnering with IVS in Remote Ed. It also aligns with the Quality Matters framework for online courses.

During the year, you will need to log the communication. This documentation will be used as a data point when reporting communication frequency to ISBE. Please note: This document will capture the frequency not the quantity.

## Directions for Communication Log

Please use the following codes to document communication under the tool used. Communication needs to be kept up-to-date (weekly) per course. This document will be an Excel workbook that is shared via Google Doc between the teacher and Barb. Teachers having more than one course will complete the log for each course – course names will be recorded on each tab of the Excel workbook. Teachers will be compensated \$25.00 monthly per course for communication logs that are maintain weekly. Logs will be checked each Monday. Compensation will be added to the following month's payroll.

**Directions:** For each day communication is made, please use the letter codes on the left to identify the purpose of communication under the tool used. In some cases, the communication may serve several purposes. Please use your Communication Plan to determine the primary purpose of the communication, and use the most appropriate letter code for that primary purpose. For example: If you put the Welcome email in the Connecting with Students section in your plan, please code that communication with "A." Remember that the purpose of the Log is to report frequency of tools used and purposes of communication. Numbers are not needed :)

It is important that this documentation accurately reflects what is happening. There will be days when you are communicating more than others. The goal is to be able to accurately share the frequency of communication, along with the purpose and tool used, to our stakeholders.

PURPOSE CODES

- A – Connecting with Students
- B - General Info
- C – Reporting Student Progress
- D - Instructional Support
- E – Connecting with Schools

Sample documentation...

	Individual Email	Phone	Sync -Web (individual)	Sync - Web (group)	News Item	Social Tools	MAESTRO - Bulk
8/21/2014							A
8/22/2014					B		
8/23/2014						B	
8/24/2014							
8/25/2014							
8/26/2014							
8/27/2014							
8/28/2014	D				D		
8/29/2014							
8/30/2014				B			

# Michigan Virtual School

## KEY FEATURES

Lead Instructors are responsible for teaching 150 students per academic term and working on curriculum development.

MVS is a site for pre-service and in-service teacher field experiences.

Instructor Corner, a shared space for instructors in Blackboard, is a way for teachers to discuss content-specific issues.

MVS hosts an annual event known as "Collaboration of the Minds" where all instructors come together for a two-day, face-to-face professional development opportunity.

## Introduction

The *Michigan Virtual School* (MVS®) is a state-supported, supplemental provider of online courses for middle and high school students. MVS does not grant course credit or award diplomas independently, but rather works in partnership with local and intermediate districts which award credit or diplomas. Since its inception in 2000, MVS has recorded over 146,000 course enrollments. Offering Advanced Placement®, core and elective coursework, MVS provides a wide array of courses for students needing online courses to match learning styles, solve scheduling conflicts, provide credit recovery opportunities, and access courses not offered in their local districts.

## About MVS's Instructional Staff

MVS's current instructional staff includes nine full-time instructors, three Lead Instructors (full-time), and 173 independently contracted instructors. In the past, MVS used independently-contracted instructors as department chairs, but they have since changed to incorporate Lead Instructors in each content area. Lead Instructors are responsible for teaching 150 students per academic term; in addition, they contribute to curriculum development work. Lead Instructors are also content experts in their area and must be a member of their Michigan content-specific professional organization. When a Lead Instructor position becomes vacant or a new Lead Instructor position is created, it is advertised both internally and externally.

MVS typically hires independently-contracted instructors as part-time instructors, especially when there is a shortage of teachers in an area, such as computer science. These instructors teach up to 90 students per academic term if they are also working full-time in a face-to-face school. If they are retired or not working anywhere else full-time, the independently-contracted instructors can have up to 180 students per academic term.

The MVU Vice President of Operations handles the contracts for independent contractors and ensures that federal IRS requirements and Fair Labor standards are met. The contract contains the necessary components MVS and the independently-contracted instructor agree upon as they work together. The Vice President of Operations, Executive Director of Programs, and Executive Director of Human Resources continuously work together to make clear distinctions between the responsibilities and expectations of the independently-contracted instructional staff and full-time instructional staff. MVU is limited in what it can ask an independent contractor to do. For instance, MVS cannot require an independently-contracted teacher to have a set weekly office hour for a course. Many independently-contracted teachers have created their own businesses (LLC), which limits their legal liability.

A survey was administered to gain additional information about the instructors. A total of 124 instructors completed it. About 67.7% of the instructional staff are female. MVS has two deaf instructors. In addition, one instructor is wheelchair bound. The tables and graphs below provide some information about their background. Table 1 shows the breakdown of the ethnicity of the staff, while Table 2 shows their educational background.

Table 1. Ethnicity

Ethnicity	Frequency	Percentage
Hispanic or Latino	2	1.6%
Asian	1	0.8%
Black or African American	4	3.2%
White	116	93.6%
Other	1	0.8%

Table 2. Highest degree earned

Degree	Frequency	Percentage
Bachelor’s degree	21	16.0%
Master’s degree	102	77.9%
Professional degree – Ed.S.	5	3.8%
Doctorate degree – Ph.D., Ed.D., M.D.	3	2.3%

Most of the instructors said that they had taken at least seven courses online for a degree and/or professional development purposes. When asked if they had ever been a face-to-face teacher, 97.6% said that they had. Roughly 65% of MVS instructors, according to the survey, currently teach face-to-face. Table 3 shows the grade levels that the instructional staff is teaching/has taught face-to-face. Instructors had the option to choose more than one category of grade levels.

Table 3. Grade levels taught face-to-face

Grade Levels	Frequency	Relative Frequency
K-2	10	6.9%
3-5	13	9%
6-8	74	51%
9-12	125	86.2%
Higher Ed	37	25.5%

The staff’s average years of teaching online was 5.3 years. When asked how many years they had been teaching at MVS specifically, the average was 4.9 years, the maximum was 14 years, and the minimum was not yet a year. Table 4 shows the content areas that the instructors have taught/are currently teaching face-to-face.

Table 4. Content areas taught face-to-face

Content Area	Frequency
English	44
World Languages	31
Math	27
Science	31
Social Studies	39
Other*	53

\* Other – Study Skills/Critical Thinking, Special Education, Computer Science, Technology, Business, Leadership, Speech, Drama, Physical Education, Vocational Home Economics, Vocational Food Service Management, Health, Instrumental Music, Engineering, Government, Economics, Sign Language, Art, Computer Graphics, Religion, Journalism, Humanities, Psychology, Medical Terminology, Health Occupations.

Table 5 shows the grade levels that instructional staff is teaching or has taught online. Instructors had the option to choose more than one category of grade levels.

Table 5. Grade levels taught online

Grade Levels	Frequency	Relative Frequency
K-5	0	--
6-8	27	18.6%
9-12	129	89%
Higher Ed	11	7.6%

Table 6 shows the content areas that the instructors have taught/are currently teaching online.

Table 6. Content areas taught online

Content area	Frequency
English	21
World Languages	30
Math	19
Science	25
Social Studies	27
Other*	40

\* Other – Online Success Strategies, Web Design, Technology, Computer Science, Life Skills, Business, Study Skills, Employability Skills, Physical Education, Health Education, Career Skills, Music Appreciation, Sign Language, Art, Digital Imaging, Journalism, Art History, Medical Terminology

The majority of the instructors are located in Michigan. Table 7 illustrates the counties in which the teachers reside. Five teachers reported that they live outside of Michigan, within the following cities and states: Holly Springs, North Carolina (1), Orange City, Florida (1), Elk Horn, Kentucky (1), Marinette, Wisconsin (1), and Vernal, Utah (1).



**Table 7. Instructor locations in Michigan by county (ordered by high to low frequency)**

County (MI)	Cities	# of Instructors
Oakland	Rochester Hills (3*), Rochester (3), Ortonville (2), Oxford (2), West Bloomfield Township (2), Berkley, Southfield, Troy, Bloomfield Hills, Auburn Hills, Clarkston, Lake Orion, Commerce Township, White Lake	21
Eaton	Eaton Rapids (4), Charlotte (2), Dimondale (2), Lansing (2), Grand Ledge	11
Kent	Rockford (2), Grandville (2), Cedar Springs, Grand Rapids, East Grand Rapids, Forest Hills, Ada	9
Wayne	Dearborn (2), Belleville, Flat Rock, Grosse Ile, Romulus, Canton, Detroit	8
Ingham	Williamston (3), Okemos (2), Lansing, East Lansing	7
Genesee	Fenton (2), Grand Blanc (2), Swartz Creek	5
Lenawee	Adrian (4)	4
Macomb	Sterling Heights (2), Macomb, Utica	4
Ottawa	Grand Haven, Jenison, Spring Lake, Zeeland	4
Clinton	St Johns (2), DeWitt	3
Marquette	Negaunee, Gwinn, Marquette	3
Monroe	Lambertville, Milan, Monroe	3
Alger	Chatham, Munising	2
Barry	Hastings, Middleville	2
Jackson	Springport, Jackson	2
Kalamazoo	Portage, Kalamazoo	2
Livingston	Fowlerville, Howell	2
Ogemaw	Rose City (2)	2
Shiawassee	Owosso, Byron Center	2
St. Clair	Marysville, Casco	2
Tuscola	Kingston, Millington	2
Van Buren	Mattawan, Grand Junction	2
Washtenaw	Ann Arbor, Dexter	2
Allegan	Plainwell	1
Chippewa	Sault Ste. Marie	1
Gladwin	Gladwin	1
Isabella	Mt. Pleasant	1
Kalkaska	Kalkaska	1
Lake	Irons	1
Lapeer	Lapeer	1
Mackinac	Engadine	1
Montcalm	Vestaburg	1
Muskegon	North Muskegon	1
Newaygo	Grant	1
Osceola	Ewart	1
Otsego	Gaylord	1
Saginaw	Saginaw	1
Sanilac	Melvin	1

\*Number in parentheses is the number of instructors from that city. If there is only 1 instructor from a location, parentheses are not used after a city.

mvlri.org

## Recruit & Hire

The staffing needs of the MVS Instructional program tend to fluctuate from year to year. Generally speaking, the first notification of an open instructional position goes to MVS's current instructional staff, including both full-time and independently-contracted instructors, to encourage current staff to apply and to recommend others for the openings. Then MVS also posts on the MVU website and social media to recruit teachers using MVU's *LinkedIn*, *Facebook*, and *Twitter* accounts. The position openings are provided to teacher colleges in the state as well. Three colleges offer preservice teachers the opportunity to shadow current MVS teachers, so these potential recruits also receive information about the positions.

MVS instructional staff participate in Career Fairs, especially at Michigan universities, and recruit at conferences, including the Michigan Association for Computer Users in Learning (MACUL) Annual Conference. They set up booths where potential recruits can scan a QR code with their smartphone or pick up a pamphlet to find out more about MVU career opportunities. MVU advertises open positions with professional organizations including the Michigan Association of Secondary School Principals (MASSP) and the Michigan Education Association (MEA). In addition, MVS posts instructional vacancies in journals such as the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development's (ASCD) *SMART Brief*, the International Society for Technology in Education's *Learning and Leading*, and EdSurge.

When there is a need to find a highly-qualified teacher in an area where there are fewer teacher candidates, such as in computer science, MVS advertises in major papers as well as in content-specific professional organization forums, including but not limited to the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL), Michigan World Language Association (MWLA), Michigan Council of Teachers of English (MCTE), Michigan Council of Teachers of Mathematics (MCTM), Michigan Council for the Social Studies (MCSS), and Michigan Science Teachers Association (MSTA). MVS staff will also consider advertising on *Monster.com*, *CareerBuilder.com*, *TeacherSupportNetwork.com*, and *indeed.com*. The advertisements strongly emphasize that MVS requires Michigan-certified, highly qualified instructors: advertising for an Advanced Placement course instructor stipulates candidates must be AP-certified.

To apply for positions, candidates submit their application information through the MVU website using Applitrack, a cloud-based applicant management system that MVS purchased from Aspex Solutions. (The system is a web front end for a database where user roles define how information is accessed.) Applitrack is used specifically for recruiting purposes. When MVS posts an opening on their website, the applicant is directed to Applitrack to provide the necessary information and submit their resumes accordingly. Applicants are given input options via data entry fields or fillable web forms; HR staff and System Administrators are given a review function where applications and attached documentation are searchable and reportable. Some of the enhanced features of this service, besides the ease of application versus a manual paper system, is from the Human Resources side, as there are a large number of automation options available which helps to reduce the amount of manual entry and revision as applicants are moved through the recruiting, interviewing, and hiring processes. These automations start from auto-listing open positions to only job-search websites, notifications to hiring managers of new or modified applications, custom form collection and distribution, and interview scheduling (including an option specific to teachers for an initial phone screening). Teachers can include their resume, teaching certificate, application, transcripts, list of references,

etc, and save these for whatever position(s) they are applying for. The Instructional Manager has the opportunity to pre-screen in Applitrack, which is helpful when there are many applicants for a single position.

Once the teacher candidate completes the application process, he/she completes a telephone interview with MVS. Examples of interview questions include “How would you align curriculum?”, “Could you describe a time when you had to talk with a student about their progress that is not satisfactory?”, “How do you engage students?”, “Tell me your educational story.” or “How would you teach a specific concept in this class?” Questions for each candidate are specific to their content area and dependent also on gaps in information within their applicant packet.

The Instructional Manager typically takes the lead on instructor interviews; however, sometimes the Instructional Manager will reach out to a content specialty teacher for help when it is for an area that is unfamiliar. For instance, if MVS is hiring a teacher for C++, the Instructional Manager will tap into the expertise of current MVS computer science instructors for help with the interview. Typically two to four instructional staff participate in the interview process with the Instructional Manager and are advised about how to ask the appropriate interview questions. Since the MVS Curriculum and Instruction staff feel they can teach the candidates the technology, the staff looks for candidates with solid background in their content area. They are particularly interested in candidates with dual certification, i.e., they might be certified in both Spanish and Mathematics.

When a candidate has been identified for hire, the Instructional Manager recommends that candidate to the Director of Curriculum and Instruction. The Director of Curriculum and Instruction and the Instructional Manager discuss the candidate and decide if any additional information is needed to make an informed hiring decision. When they compare teacher candidates today with those of just a few years ago, both the Instructional Manager and the Director of Curriculum and Instruction emphasize that it is rare to see a candidate who is not tech-savvy. That used to be a critical piece for which they scanned. Today, most of the candidates have experience with learning management systems and/or have taken an online course and know what bad online instruction is and can articulate that. Candidates who are offered a position need to complete paperwork including but not limited to a contract, an image or recording release, disclosure of unprofessional conduct from previous employers, a certificate of liability insurance, W-9, Schedule C, and Worker’s Compensation. Also part of the hiring process is that all MVS instructors submit a picture and short biography of themselves. MVS posts this information within the instructor’s courses and on the MVU website so parents and other customers can see who the teachers are.

## **Train & Support**

Once new teachers are hired at MVS, the Instructional Manager engages them in a one-on-one meeting to provide an overview of the three technology systems – Outlook Web Access (OWA), Blackboard, and Customer and Enrollment Management Systems (CEMS) – that are most integral for their work. The meeting is a practical meeting conducted via phone. The Instructional Manager makes sure the new instructor’s log-ins and passwords are working so that he/she is ready for his/her courses. During the meeting, the Instructional Manager is signed into the new hire’s course, and they walk through the course together. Instructors are provided with a pre-flight checklist before the

academic term starts. The checklist includes assuring that all dates are set for the new academic term, that the syllabus and pacing charts are updated, that all of the external links are functioning correctly, etc., so the course is ready to go on the course start date.

The new instructors also have to complete the *Online Instructor Training (OIT)*, an online course delivered via Blackboard; it is divided into four modules covering online pedagogy, using Blackboard, how to communicate, best practices in online teaching, and additional topics relevant to online teaching and learning. OIT takes about four weeks to complete. The culminating activity is for instructors to produce a lesson within a mock classroom and to walk the Instructional Manager through their design while explaining how they would teach that lesson.

From there, the Instructional Manager transitions the new teachers on to their Lead Instructor who becomes one of their mentors. The Lead Instructor may or may not be in the new instructor's content area. If the Lead is not in the new instructor's content area, the new instructor will also be paired with an experienced instructor who teaches the same course he/she is assigned. This instructor offers assistance in walking the new instructor through the course so that the new instructor can get familiar with it, discuss the course content, see how it works, and establish an understanding of uniformity in how the experienced instructor grades and assesses students.

While the Lead Instructor and the content area instructor are there to help the new instructor, the new instructors are responsible for reaching out when they need help. Overall, the first year teaching online is the biggest learning hurdle for MVS instructors. According to the instructional staff, it typically takes a year before new instructors are comfortable teaching online. They are given unsolicited virtual support, but often they seek additional coaching and advice. In the past, the Instructional Manager conducted a quarterly call with new instructors; but because of the steep increase in hires (there have been 24 new hires so far for 2014), it has become too difficult to keep up with that strategy. During the quarterly calls that did occur, new hires were offered more in depth support with one of the three systems that is used at MVS. They were also encouraged to come with questions. Each quarter, the call was on a different topic. The new instructors really enjoyed these sessions and worried when they missed them. The MVS team feels that there is so much that new instructors have to learn in the beginning that it is better not to overwhelm them at first. Instead, they encourage the new instructors to go into their courses and ask questions as they have them. The entire instructional staff also use Instructor Corner in Blackboard to discuss information within their content-specific disciplines, including conferences, professional development, and issues in the discipline.

Beyond training for new teachers, there are multiple opportunities for both new and experienced teachers to take part in professional development at MVS. Included in these opportunities is an annual event, typically held in August, called "Collaboration of the Minds" (COM) where about 80% of the instructors come together face-to-face for two days. The event includes an update from the MVU President regarding current Legislation in Michigan education; inspirational talks from those within and outside of the education field sharing information about diversity, student engagement, and students with disabilities; networking times for content areas led by the Lead Instructors; sessions on a new skill or software developed by the full-time instructors; and an introduction to new curriculum by the Director of Curriculum (12 new courses introduced in summer 2014 – including Archaeology, Anthropology, Great Minds in Science, Criminology, Hospitality & Entertainment and others). New this year was ed camp, a revolutionary way of providing professional development. Ed

camps leave the traditional stand-and-deliver, one-shot sessions behind and make way for highly interactive and organic space for instructors to get together and share ideas about current, relevant issues. The ed camp starts off with a white board where instructors can add sticky notes with current issues they are experiencing. The coordinators of the event then group like-minded issues together, organize teachers based on those like-minded issues, and ask one of them to facilitate. Ed camp is a personalized, just-in-time route for professional development.

Overall, COM brings the instructors together as a group once a year, which helps to answer many questions and concerns. Independently-contracted instructors are paid a stipend to attend COM. Full-time instructors have a set amount of professional development funds that allow them to attend conferences, workshops, AP training, etc. Instructors are asked to attend two face-to-face professional development opportunities per year. Instructors have the opportunity to reconnect with one another on an additional professional development day that coincides with MACUL, the state technology conference. These face-to-face training opportunities are designed by the Curriculum and Instruction team who comes up with a theme for the training, the majority of which is hands-on and active. Teachers who feel they are experts with certain instructional strategies sign up to lead sessions and are paid a stipend for their efforts. MVS is also involved in helping to develop modules for the State Virtual School Alliance Summer Professional Development. This started Summer 2014 and provided another opportunity for MVS instructors' continuing education. Instructional staff has found that teaching online is great professional development for those who also teach face-to-face.

There is no formal teacher mentoring process at MVS. Typically, when teachers need help, they reach out to the Instructional Manager, their Lead Instructor, or fellow instructors. Lead Instructors help both new and experienced instructors with issues they are facing, including but not limited to employment aspects, such as pay, and academic information, such as progress reports, systems, and on-site mentor-related questions. The Instructional Manager is in regular communication with the instructional staff via email. In addition to the face-to-face meetings, the Lead Instructors hold group meetings via Skype and the telephone. Department break-out groups help answer many of the instructors' questions and concerns. There is also additional correspondence via a newsletter. The MVS Curriculum and Instruction group has tried to do webinars for professional development, but that has not been well received by the instructors; they thrive on face-to-face meetings. Additionally, many of the independently-contracted instructors also work as full-time face-to-face teachers, so the timing of the webinars did not always work out with their schedules.

## Evaluate

MVS's teacher evaluation process ensures that instructors are there to support the students and that they are actively engaging them with the content. In terms of expectations for instructional staff, there is a 24-hour turnaround time for general communication. MVS instructors must log in to their classrooms every day, Monday through Friday, and keep their course information current, including fixing any typos or mistakes. Assignments must be scored and feedback provided to the student within 72 hours of submission.

All MVS independently-contracted instructors are hired via year-to-year contracts. New independently-contracted instructors are evaluated three years in a row and then put on a three-year rotation. All contract teachers are informally evaluated, randomly, throughout the year. Informal evaluations consist of periodic views into Blackboard login records, gradebooks, and Customer and Enrollment Management System (CEMS) student records. The Lead Instructors check in on the courses at least twice an academic term and look for criteria, such as teacher presence and teacher feedback. The formal evaluations are staggered so that each year one third of the staff gets an annual performance evaluation. The complete evaluation plan is located in Appendix MI-1. A mentor survey is part of the evaluation in addition to an end-of-course student survey. Instructors also complete a self-assessment. Once all data are gathered, it is benchmarked against the department-wide data.

Prior to the start of courses, the Instructional Manager and Director of Curriculum and Instruction do a virtual walkthrough and write up an evaluation of the class visit. The same pre-flight checklist mentioned in the training section is used for the virtual walkthroughs. Included in this checklist is the design of the course, the engagement of students within the course, presence in the discussion board, the grading of assignments, pacing guides, etc.

MVS follows all of the state laws and the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission EEOC, and the contracted instructors are at-will employees. When an instructor is not meeting expectations, MVS provides feedback and notice to the instructor on what can be done to improve. If instructors are not meeting expectations, instructor contracts can be terminated. Typically the student, parent, or mentor submits a HELP Desk ticket when they are unsatisfied and the issue is dealt with immediately and resolved to the customers' satisfaction. The Instructional Manager follows-up on all HELP Desk ticket submissions and has a one-on-one conversation with the individual instructor involved.

## Retain

One-year contracts make re-recruitment an annual issue. For the 2012/2013 FY, MVU paid 131 instructors. For FY 2013/2014, 106 of the 131 or 80.9% are teaching for MVS again. Turnover typically occurs for many different reasons including the instructors realizing they are too busy with their full-time job to continue teaching with MVS, a life-changing event such as a new child, retirement, moving, etc. At the COM professional development event, independently-contracted instructors are asked to sign another contract for the next year if they are continuing on with MVS.

MVS's strategies for teacher retention include competitive pay, professional development, a flexible work environment, and support systems. An additional incentive for full-time instructors is that they may have the opportunity to continue their education via masters and doctoral programs if accepted into the MVS tuition reimbursement program. The Instructional Manager also provides an abundance of support to the instructional staff and advocates for instructors when they are having difficulties with school leaders, mentors, and/or parents.

## Appendix MI-1

### **Michigan Virtual School Evaluation Plan**

**To:** INSTRUCTOR'S NAME

**RE:** Performance Review for Academic Year 2010-2011

**Date:**

#### **Purpose**

The purpose of this performance evaluation is to open the lines of communication between yourself and *Michigan Virtual School (MVS)* with the desired outcome of meeting this organization's strategic objectives. Further, this feedback will serve as a historical record of your performance with MVS as well as shape professional development opportunities for you which are aligned to our organization.

#### **Data Feedback**

A variety of sources were used to provide a better picture of your individual online instructor performance. To provide the big picture assessment of your online skills, the different categories of this assessment are color-coded.

#### **Student Achievement in Your Courses**

This data reflects fall semester 2010, trimester 1 and 2, and Fast Track sessions 1-4 for students in your courses.

- **Enrollments:** You had \_\_\_\_\_ approved enrollments during this timeframe.
- **Zero Rate:** Of those approved enrollments, \_\_\_\_\_ failed to earn a single point in the course.
- **Start Rate:** The percentage of students in your courses which started the course and earned 10% or more of the total points, was \_\_\_\_\_.
- **Completion Rate:** The percentage of your students that earned 60% or more of the total points divided by the number of enrollments that earned at least 10% of the total points was \_\_\_\_\_.



### Comparative Data for Students in all English Courses

The data below is compiled from all MVS English instructors for this same timeframe. It will provide you a chance to compare how your students performed compared to other instructors' student performance throughout the entire English discipline.

- **Enrollments:** Total English approved enrollments during this timeframe was \_\_\_\_\_.
- **Zero Rate:** Of those approved enrollments, \_\_\_\_\_ failed to earn a single point in the course.
- **Start Rate:** The percentage of students all English courses which started the course and earned 10% or more of the total points, was \_\_\_\_\_.
- **Completion Rate:** The percentage of students that earned 60% or more of the total points divided by the number of enrollments that earned at least 10% of the total points across all English courses, was \_\_\_\_\_.

### Student End of Course Surveys

This data was compiled from your student end of course surveys for the timeframe:\_\_\_\_\_. Remember that end of course surveys are taken voluntarily by our students.

### Rubric

Scale: Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree

Instructor responded to my questions in a timely manner

Instructor provided feedback on assignments and tests in a timely manner

Instructor provided feedback in a way that helped me learn

Instructor encouraged me to do my best

### Mentor Surveys

This feedback was provided by the mentors of your online students for this timeframe.

## **Rubric**

Scale: Strongly Agree, Agree, Strongly Disagree, Does Not Apply

You were welcomed to class at the beginning of the course by this instructor

The Pacing Guide was helpful in structuring student learning for this course.

Grades were kept up-to-date.

Substantive feedback was provided to students on their submitted assignments

I was kept informed of student progress at least twice throughout the course.

This instructor responded to my emails/messages within 24 hours Monday through Friday when school was in session.

This online instructor was professional in her or his interactions with me.

I would recommend this instructor for future students taking online classes.

Open Ended Comments;

## **Attendance at Professional Development Opportunities**

*Michigan Virtual University* provides unique professional development opportunities specifically designed for online instructors. The purpose of providing such opportunities is to help you grow your skills as an online instructor so that you become a valued asset to the organization. You attended and actively participated in the following professional development activities.

### **Attended**

#### **PD Activity**

MACUL 2011

Collaboration of the Minds 2010

A monthly PD webinar

- 3/18/10 – Gradebook updates in Bb
- 4/15/10 – Teacher Presence
- 5/21/10 – Establish a Personal Learning Network
- 6/17/10 – Web 2.0 tools

A Learnport course for this timeframe

Other events, courses, activities you participated in that contributed to your personal professional development as an online instructor in the past year.

## Department Chair Feedback

Department Chairs are responsible for periodic visits to your online classroom to ensure instructor presence and that a positive student learning environment is being maintained. Here is feedback regarding your performance provided by your Department Chair.

Presence in Classroom

Instructor Monitor Checklists

Pre-flight Checklists

Professionalism with Dept. Chair

Ability to handle online classroom issues

Comments

## Instructor Self-Assessment

This data reflects your self-assessment of your online performance for *Michigan Virtual School* for this timeframe. Note that these are the items for which you are contractually obligated as per your instructor contract with *Michigan Virtual University*.

Scale: Always, Mostly, Varies, Sometimes, Rarely

### 1. Rate yourself in the area of class site management.

- Develops and maintains informative, up-to-date announcement page and changes announcements weekly
- Monitors discussion board threads
- Provides an up-to-date course pacing guide and keeps students on pace
- Complements instructional materials with appropriate supplementary information

### 2. Rate yourself in the area of communication.

- Welcome communication sent to all students and mentors within 2 days of the enrollment being placed on the course site. Checks class section roster routinely to meet this responsibility
- Responds to student, mentor, parent, or MVS staff emails within 24 hours Monday through Friday excluding MVS designated holidays
- Maintains an ongoing positive communication with mentors
- Email communication characterized by a positive tone
- Informs MVS administrators of student, mentor, e-textbook, or teaching issues/problems
- Academic comments are accurate and factually based, evidencing a sound knowledge of the curriculum
- Works to have all students complete the course
- Recognizes individual differences, special needs, and diverse backgrounds, and adjusts instruction accordingly

3. Rate yourself in the area of administrative duties.

- Student assignments, quizzes and tests are scored within 72 hours Monday through Friday
- Student assignments, quiz and test scores are posted in the Blackboard gradebook as they are scored
- Maintains Blackboard as the official gradebook of record. Maintains gradebook for routine viewing by students, mentors, and MVS staff
- Records student final scores in CEMS and in the Blackboard gradebook within 10 days after the course end date
- Completes at least two progress reports per semester, trimester, or session and includes comments that are complete and designed to improve the student performance.

4. Rate yourself in the area of attendance.

- Logs into Blackboard and accesses their class site daily to make necessary posts to the discussion board, grade assignments and answer emails/messages
- Plans for absences of 1 week or longer and communicates them to MVS in advance or within 24 hours if an unplanned absence occurs due to illness or emergency

# Montana Digital Academy

## KEY FEATURES

Montana's public state virtual school is located on the University of Montana campus in Missoula.

MTDA only hires teachers who are currently teaching in Montana public schools and have an MOU with the districts where they recruit teachers.

MTDA has a support desk that teachers can contact at any time for assistance with issues they are having.

Staff approaches mentoring as more of a community-based structure than a top-down relationship.

## Introduction

Montana Digital Academy (MTDA) is Montana's public state virtual school, located on the University of Montana campus in Missoula, Montana. MTDA offers opportunities to students to make up core courses, enroll in Advanced Placement courses, explore unique elective courses, and more. They are a semester-based, cohort style program and have three semesters: Fall, Spring and Summer. They also accommodate home school students.<sup>1</sup>

## Montana Digital Academy's Instructional Staff

MTDA only hires teachers who are currently teaching in Montana public schools. They do not hire teachers coming directly out of their teacher education programs. While there are times when they have hired teachers early in their careers, they have never hired a first-year teacher. MTDA contracts with the local school where the teacher is employed. The majority of their teachers are teaching full-time in a face-to-face school and teach MTDA courses on the side. A few teachers work part-time elsewhere and part-time with MTDA, and a number of teachers serve other roles in districts, including superintendent, principal, and other administrative positions.

Until Spring of 2014, MTDA only had three FTE on staff. Now, because MTDA has taken on additional projects, there are nine FTEs in the central office. They have about 8,000 student enrollments this year and over 100 teachers. Their courses are broken down into sections, with a cap of 25 students per section. Generally, MTDA prefers not to assign a teacher more than one section; however, sometimes they have identified a teacher who can make appropriate commitment expectations for the extra section. There is a support desk that teachers can contact at any time to ask about issues.

1 <http://www.montanadigitalacademy.org/>

An online survey was administered; the data is shared below. Out of the 74 respondents, 66% are female. Table 1 shows the breakdown of the ethnicity of the staff, while Table 2 shows their educational background.

**Table 1. Ethnicity**

Ethnicity	Frequency	Percentage
Hispanic or Latino	2	2.7%
Black or African American	-	-
American Indian or Alaska Native	-	-
Asian	1	1.3%
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	1	1.3%
White	72	96.0%

**Table 2. Highest degree earned**

Degree	Frequency	Percentage
Bachelor's degree	22	29.7%
Master's degree	48	64.9%
Professional degree – Ed.S.	1	1.4%
Doctorate degree – Ph.D., Ed.D., M.D.	3	4.0%

The median number of classes that teachers have taken online for a degree and/or professional development purposes is nine courses (with a maximum number of 45 and a minimum of 0). When asked if they had ever been a face-to-face teacher, 99% said yes. When asked if they taught face-to-face currently, 89% said yes. Table 3 shows the grade levels that the instructional staff are teaching/have taught face-to-face. Table 4 shows the subjects that the instructors have taught/are currently teaching face-to-face.

**Table 3. Grade levels taught face-to-face**

Grade Levels	Frequency	Percentage
K-2	14	18.7%
3-5	15	20.0%
6-8	46	61.3%
9-12	70	93.3%
Higher Ed	15	20.0%

**Table 4. Subjects taught face-to-face**

Subject	Frequency
English	21
World Languages	13
Math	18
Science	16
Social Studies	21
Other*	32

\* Other – Business, Methods of Teaching English, Journalism, Special Education, Library, Health Science, National Writing Project Institutes, Computer, Art, Music, Reading Intervention

The staff's median years of teaching online was 4.6 with a minimum of one year and a maximum of 15 years. When asked how many years they had been teaching at MTDA specifically, the median was 3.7, the maximum six years, and the minimum was one. Table 5 shows the grade levels that instructional staff is teaching or has taught online. Table 6 shows the subjects that the instructors have taught/are currently teaching online.

**Table 5. Grade levels taught online**

Grade Levels	Frequency	Percentage
K-5	1	1.3%
6-8	7	9.3%
9-12	74	98.7%
Higher Ed	9	12.0%

**Table 6. Subjects taught online**

Subject	Frequency
English	13
World Languages	12
Math	13
Science	14
Social Studies	12
Other*	24

\* Other – Business, PD for teachers, Health and Physical Education, Art, Computer Science, Technology Education, Photography

All instructors who were surveyed are located in Montana. Table 7 illustrates the counties in which the teachers reside.

**Table 7. Instructor locations in Montana by county (ordered by high to low frequency)**

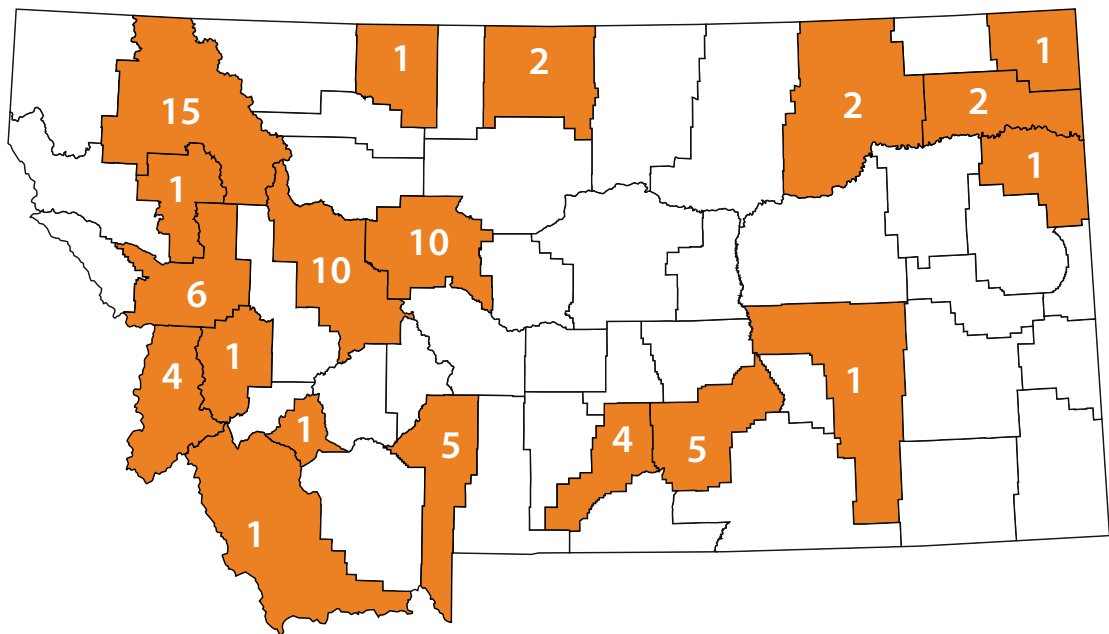
County (MT)	Cities	# of Instructors
Flathead	Kalispell (9), Whitefish (3), Columbia Falls (2), Marion	15
Cascade	Great Falls	10
Lewis and Clark	Helena (9), East Helena	10
Missoula	Missoula, Frenchtown	6
Gallatin	Bozeman (2), Sedan (2), Manhattan	5
Yellowstone	Billings	5
Ravalli	Hamilton (2), Stevensville (2)	4
Stillwater	Columbus (2), Absarokee, Park City	4
Hill	Havre	2
Roosevelt	Wolf Point	2
Valley	Hinsdale	2
Beaverhead	Dillon	1
Deer Lodge	Anaconda	1
Granite	Philipsburg	1
Lake	Arlee	1
Richland	Sidney	1
Rosebud	Colstrip	1
Sheridan	Plentywood	1
Toole	Shelby	1

\*Number in parentheses is the number of instructors from that city. If there is only 1 instructor from a location, parentheses are not used after a city



The following map shows the instructors’ distribution per county across the state of Montana.

Map. MTDA instructors per county in the state of Montana



## Recruit & Hire

To recruit teachers at MTDA, staff use their website to post employment opportunities according to standard Human Resources procedures. The staff also recruit internally, so they rely heavily on word-of-mouth by their current teachers to fill vacant and/or new positions. Some of their best hires have been from internal referrals. MTDA also uses statewide lists for administrators and teachers and the state office's employment list.

To apply for MTDA positions, candidates go through a three-step process that starts with a standardized application. The second step is a resume, and the third and final step is a letter of support from a current administrator. Within the Memorandum of Understanding between MTDA and the districts from which they recruit teachers, the local school has the ability to request that MTDA not use a particular instructor.

MTDA reviews applications every two weeks, sometimes sooner depending on the time of year and instructional needs. Once potential candidates are identified, they are asked to participate in an interview using a web-conferencing tool called GoToMeeting. MTDA uses this tool to observe candidates' use of and ease with technology. The Assistant Director/Curriculum Director, and sometimes the Executive Director, as well as other staff, are included in the interview process. A panel of interviewers conducts an eight-question interview, which is more of a conversation than a formal interview. This is an ideal time to explain to the candidates what teaching online is like, since often they are unaware of what is different about being an online instructor. Staff encourage candidates to arrive at this stage of the process with more questions for MTDA than MTDA has for them.

MTDA neither requires nor expects candidates to have experience teaching online and/or taking courses online. MTDA has thought about adopting a similar model to Georgia Virtual School's that requires candidates to take a course in online teaching methodologies before considering them for online teaching positions. They have not moved forward with this plan because it would allow them less flexibility in making hiring decisions. Because MTDA has courses that require specialized knowledge or background, they often need to hire someone as soon as possible to fill a unique space.

When looking for potential online teachers, MTDA looks for a person who has a philosophical belief in online teaching and who understands that teaching online is an extremely significant time commitment for both teachers and students. MTDA emphasizes that teachers need to be flexible and fluid due to the constantly changing environment. At the same time, they stress the need for teachers who maintain and uphold the standards for high-quality student outcomes. MTDA also appreciates teachers who come in with technology-rich skills. While they can teach some technology skills, they acknowledge that they do not have the ability to calm teachers who panic when something technology-related goes awry.

Every teacher who works for MTDA must have a background check and fingerprinting. Districts take on these responsibilities. The close relationship established by the MOU between MTDA and the local schools negates MTDA's responsibility for having to take on this part of the process.

## Train & Support

Training for new instructors involves 10-20 hours of digital tool training, which includes the Student Information System (SIS) and Learning Management System (LMS), TurnItIn (plagiarism tool), Kaltura (video server and screencasting tools to build relationships and encourage teacher voice and connection), and SnagIt (screen capture software).

Each fall there is a self-paced digital course for teachers. This course presents the MTDA Handbook, teacher expectations, and anything that is new to the program. The staff approach mentoring as more of a community-based structure rather than top-down, thus they focus their time with the newest members of the instructional staff, supporting them as they learn the new system and connecting the new instructors with at least two to three new people. Staff are mindful of making the new teachers feel comfortable, asking any questions that come up so they can move forward in their work as comfortably and as well-informed as possible. In addition to mentoring newcomers, MTDA counts on their veteran teachers (instructors with multiple years of experience) to help update the Handbook as well as any other orientation materials.

One of the most common issues that first-time teachers experience is understanding how engaging students online is different from engaging them face-to-face. MTDA staff understand students are coming into the online environment from a traditional setting, and they take the position that teachers need to be trained accordingly to help students understand the key differences in learning online. While there are also some frustrations with the LMS and other tools, MTDA helps teachers build capacity so that their work in the systems is more empowering. Sometimes teachers misunderstand how much time it takes to teach online versus face-to-face. The first month can be overwhelming for new instructors; however, after the second time through a course, new MTDA instructors are fairly comfortable teaching online. Using engagement and communication logs helps MTDA identify those teachers who may be struggling.

Beyond new teacher training, there are three additional professional development opportunities available for MTDA teachers. At the state teacher convention, they offer an Online Learning Institute, a one-day workshop, for their teachers. At the Institute, MTDA have speakers talk about key issues in K-12 online learning. During the eight-hour day, teachers can choose between two sessions that include topics such as hands-on technical information, online philosophy, and positive communication with parents and students. They offer training at the start of school to prepare teachers for anything new with MTDA, too. They also participate with the other state virtual schools in training that takes place in the summer and occasionally during the school year, including webinar and face-to-face trainings. Other professional development takes place because of Advanced Placement requirements and other more content-specific training. The sessions offered in-house at MTDA are mandatory while the others are optional. Trainings can count toward district-level professional development credits.

## Evaluate

MTDA evaluates all of their teachers using three members of their staff who have been externally vetted. There is an email exchange at the beginning of the year where staff discuss the teacher's needs, what they feel the individual needs to work on, and what the strategy for growth is for that academic year. These staff conduct virtual walkthroughs using the PGOTS -- Pretty Good Online Teaching Standards -- developed using the iNACOL standards as well as the Quality Matters rubrics. The three staff members use the PGOTS form to evaluate how the teachers are doing within their course and determine what support teachers need to perform better in the online learning environment. An end-of-year survey for students provides feedback about instructors as well, but this is not included as part of the evaluation process. Teachers are expected to return students' communication within one business day or sooner after receiving an email, phone call, text, etc., and teachers are expected to return graded work to students within two to three days.

## Retain

The retention rate for MTDA teachers is about 95%. The relationship between MTDA staff and their instructional staff is just as important if not more important than the relationship that teachers build with their students. One strategy most useful to retaining teachers year after year is being responsive to teachers' needs. Another strategy is the multiple training options MTDA offers to teachers. Their pay structure is competitive; and while teachers are not required to update their courses unless they are offered additional compensation to do the course revamp, the courses are regularly updated. Teachers also feel challenged at times as they feel isolated in this new teaching environment, so MTDA staff are committed to creating the best possible scenario for their teachers' experience.

# The Virtual High School

## KEY FEATURES

Established in 1996, The Virtual High School (VHS) is a non-profit organization offering supplemental and full-time online and blended learning opportunities to middle and high schools across the country and around the world.

VHS also offers professional development to teach teachers (not just their own) how to facilitate online courses and how to leverage technology in the classroom.

The majority of the teachers join the VHS instructional staff via the Collaborative/ Consortium process, where the teacher's school becomes a member of VHS and then the teacher has an opportunity to teach an online course.

Prospective teachers, whether from partner schools or with whom VHS has individually contracted, must complete VHS's graduate-level online course titled *Online Teaching Methodologies*.

Faculty Advisors (teacher mentors) check in with new teachers every week during their first semester.

## Introduction

Established in 1996, The Virtual High School (VHS) is a non-profit organization offering supplemental and full-time online and blended learning opportunities to middle and high schools across the country and around the world. VHS reaches over 17,000 students each year and works with more than 650 schools and districts. They also offer professional development to teach teachers how to facilitate online courses and how to leverage technology in the classroom. While over a third of VHS-member schools are based in New England, there are also schools in other states and more than 30 countries as well (see Map). VHS's course catalog of more than 180 courses includes 22 AP courses, core high school courses aligned to state and national standards, and dozens of middle school and high school elective courses that students may not be offered in their face-to-face schools.

## About VHS's Instructional Staff

In order to find out more information about the instructional staff at VHS, a survey was administered, and around 150 teachers responded. (Some respondents answered all questions while others did not, so the percentages/numbers may differ in the tables.) VHS has approximately 400 teachers; about 62% are female.

The staffing model in the past relied heavily on the instructional staff coming from the member schools; VHS would work with the school and teacher to find a course that matched their skills and needs. Recently, the model has shifted somewhat and VHS has been more prescriptive with schools on the course selection process, slightly limiting the choice of which course a member school teacher will teach based on

enrollment. Some courses have so many sections that VHS cannot find enough teachers within their member schools; thus, they have to look outside of those schools and contract directly with teachers. These teachers go through the same training and will contract with VHS if they fit the need for the courses needing instructors. VHS teachers rarely teach more than one course, although occasionally a small cohort of retired teachers who have more time to devote to facilitating online may teach two or even three courses.

Table 1 shows the breakdown of the ethnicity of the staff, while Table 2 shows their educational background.

Table 1. Ethnicity

Ethnicity	Frequency	Percentage
Hispanic or Latino	5	3.3%
Asian	1	0.7%
Black or African American	3	2.0%
White	145	96.0%
Other*	1	0.7%

\* - Other – Human

Table 2. Highest degree earned

Degree	Frequency	Percentage
Bachelor’s degree	18	11.5%
Master’s degree	123	78.3%
Professional degree – Ed.S.	8	5.1%
Doctorate degree – Ph.D., Ed.D., M.D.	8	5.1%

Most of the instructors said that they had taken at least six courses online for degree and/or professional development purposes. The maximum number of online classes taken was 25, while the minimum was zero. When asked if they had ever been a face-to-face teacher, 100% said that they had. When asked if they taught face-to-face currently, 88.1% said yes. Table 3 shows the grade levels that the instructional staff is teaching/has taught face-to-face. Table 4 shows the subjects that the instructors have taught/are currently teaching face-to-face.

Table 3. Grade levels taught face-to-face

Grade Levels	Frequency	Percentage
K-2	22	14.4%
3-5	20	13.1%
6-8	64	41.4%
9-12	149	97.4%
Higher Ed	44	28.8%

Table 4. Subjects taught face-to-face

Subject	Frequency
English	31
World Languages	20
Math	31
Science	40
Social Studies	44
Other*	57

\*Other – Library/media, visual art, graduate education courses, computer science, English as a second language, business, technology, music, engineering, health, professional development, psychology, study skills, special education, family and consumer science, theology, new teacher seminar, counseling, career development, preschool, anatomy and physiology

The median number of years staff reported teaching online was about 4.5. Maximum number of years teaching online was 17 while the minimum was 0. When asked how many years they had been teaching at VHS specifically, the median was 4.2, the maximum was 15, and the minimum was not yet a year. Table 5 shows the grade levels that instructional staff are currently teaching or have taught online. Table 6 shows the subjects that the instructors are currently teaching/have taught online.

Table 5. Grade levels taught online

Grade Levels	Frequency	Percentage
K-2	0	--
3-5	1	0.7%
6-8	28	19.1%
9-12	146	99.3%
Higher Ed	18	12.2%

Table 6. Subjects taught online

Subject	Frequency
English	19
World Languages	17
Math	14
Science	32
Social Studies	38
Other*	48

\* Other – art, art history, graduate education courses, library/technology, computer science, video game design, introduction to psychology, AP psychology, AP art history, business, health, technology, music, career exploration, health, international business, life skills, and Latin

A significant portion of the instructors are located in Massachusetts. Table 7 illustrates the cities and states in which the teachers reside. Two teachers reported that they live outside of the United States in the following cities and countries: Dubai, United Arab Emirates; and Zurich, Switzerland.

Table 7. Instructor locations by state (ordered by high to low frequency)

State	Cities	# of Instructors
Massachusetts	Chelmsford (2), East Sandwich (2), Hudson (2), Millbury (2), Ashland, Bridgewater, Clinton, Danvers, Dighton, Dracut, East Freetown, East Weymouth, Eastham, Easthampton, Franklin, Groton, Hadley, Hanover, Harwich, Hatfield, Hull, Jamaica Plain, Ludlow, Lynn, Maynard, Millville, Middleton, Nantucket, Newburyport, Norton, Oxford, Reading, Rutland, Somerset, South Dennis, Sterling, Sturbridge, Watertown, Webster	43
New Jersey	Blackwood, Bloomingdale, Brick, Cherry Hill, Collingswood, Dumont, Franklin Lakes, Haddonfield, Helmetta, Hillsborough Township, Keyport, Lawrence Township, Ringwood, Riverside, Waretown, Wayne	17
Connecticut	Canton, East Hartford, Fairfield, Lakeville, Naugatuck, New Fairfield, Newington, New Milford, Niantic, Norwich, Old Lyme, Rocky Hill, Somers, Stamford	14
Pennsylvania	Lansdale (2), Allentown, Bangor, Horsham, Johnstown, Norristown, Philadelphia, Pottsville, Quakertown, Reading, Robesonia	12
Vermont	Burlington, Dorset, Fairfax, Glover, Manchester Center, Middlebury, Milton, Rutland, St. Albans, South Burlington, West Dover, Winooski	12
Rhode Island	Portsmouth (2), Westerly (2), Bristol, Harrisville, Johnston, Lincoln, Pawtucket, South Kingston	10

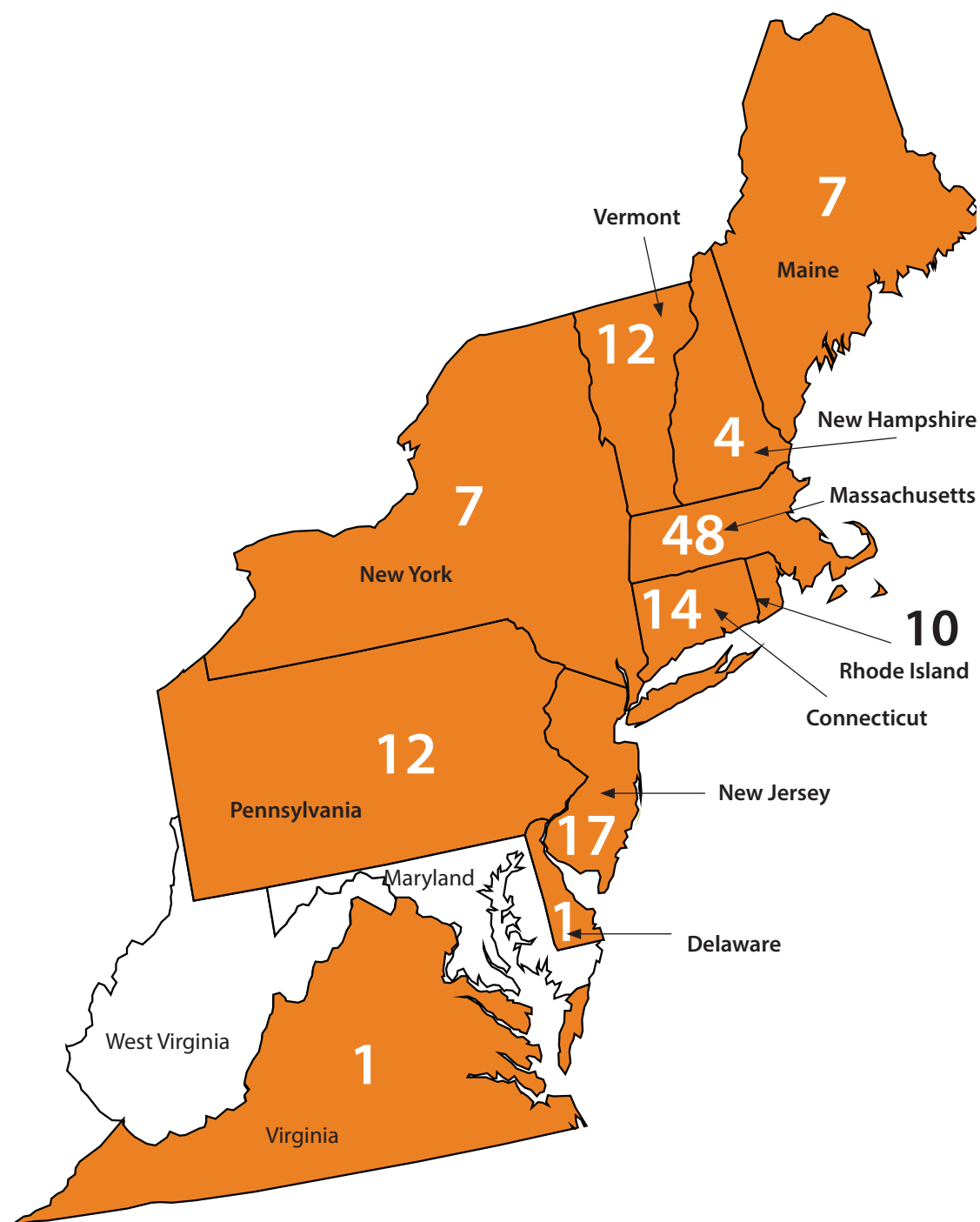


Maine	Auburn, Cornish, Hiram, Jonesport, Oakland, Sabattus, Wiscasset	7
New York	Chestertown, Nanuet, New City, New York, Troy, Wallkill, Watervliet	7
New Hampshire	Candia, Hampton, Milton, Newmarket	4
Michigan	Fenton, Grand Rapids, Holly	3
Ohio	Cincinnati, Delaware, Tiffin	3
Oregon	Eugene	3
Arkansas	Petersburg	2
Florida	Edgewater, Naples	2
Texas	Fort Worth, League City	2
Delaware	Wilmington	1
Georgia	Bremen	1
Minnesota	Duluth	1
Missouri	Kansas City	1
Montana	Bigfork	1
Virginia	Scottsville	1
Wisconsin	Beloit	1
Wyoming	Lander	1

\*Number in parentheses is the number of instructors from that city. If there is only one instructor from a location, parentheses are not used after a city.

The following map shows the instructors’ distribution per state in the Northeast region of the United States where most of the instructors are concentrated.

**Map. VHS instructors in the Northeastern region of the U.S.**



## Recruit & Hire

The majority of the teachers join the VHS instructional staff via the Collaborative/Consortium process, where the teachers' schools become a member of VHS and then the teachers have opportunities to teach online courses. As mentioned above, VHS also hires teachers as contracted employees when additional sections need to be covered. VHS lets their partner schools know what qualities they are looking for in their instructional staff: flexibility, strong written communication skills, strong interpersonal skills, and an affinity for—and facility with—technology. (See Appendix VHS-1 for VHS Teacher Responsibilities.) As the partner schools are choosing teachers to teach for VHS, they have those qualities in mind.

Teachers entering the system must successfully complete VHS's graduate-level online course, titled Online Teaching Methodologies (OTM). More information about OTM is provided in the Train & Support section of this report. (See Appendix VHS-2 for the OTM Syllabus.) When the teachers apply, they have to provide their certification information, educational background, teaching experience, and technical experience. Even though the consortium schools hire the teachers, VHS still has an application review process.

Regardless of whether a teacher is applying to teach a VHS course from within or outside of a member school, VHS reviews applications using the highly-qualified teacher standards, and applicants go through an interview process for evaluating and hiring contracted teachers. However, typically the contracted teachers have taught a VHS course previously.

If a teacher applying from a member school does not meet VHS's criteria, the member school must provide a different teacher. Beyond the federal Highly Qualified Teacher requirements, VHS has a list of additional criteria that is found on their website for teachers who are considering teaching online. Teachers must:

- Be passionate about their subject area,
- Be certified in the discipline in which they teach,
- Be an outstanding and experienced educator,
- Be self-starters who are motivated to participate in this program,
- Work well without supervision,
- Be self-disciplined,
- Be dedicated,
- Be student-centered,
- Be flexible, and
- Possess excellent written communication skills.

Additionally, AP teachers either must have taught at an AP level or have attended the AP Institute in their subject area to be considered for VHS. VHS surveys their teachers and finds that more and more teachers are entering into online teaching with prior experience as an online teacher and/or as an online student. While VHS does not use this as criteria for hiring, prior experience may be a positive addition to the prospective teacher's application. Sometimes, however, those teachers have had online experiences that are not up to par with what VHS considers quality online learning, so VHS actually needs to "re-educate" teachers to show them what is and is not quality teaching for online learning.

Teachers who teach VHS courses are fingerprinted in their face-to-face schools, and they also undergo a Criminal Offender Record Information Check.

## Train & Support

VHS trains the teachers, but they do not employ them if they are entering as part of their member school's agreement; instead, the teachers' schools employ and pay them. Training begins with the OTM course, which is a 6-week, graduate-level methodologies course. (See Appendix VHS-2 for the OTM Syllabus.) Those teachers who elect to take OTM for graduate credits receive three credits upon successful completion of the course, if they opt to purchase graduate credits from one of VHS's partner higher ed institutions. The OTM teacher training has three components: the first is becoming familiar with readings and discussions around the pedagogy of teaching online; the second is for the teachers to become acquainted with the course that they are going to be teaching; the third component is for the teachers to learn Desire2Learn, VHS's Learning Management System. The course is delivered in Desire2Learn, the same LMS used for all VHS courses, so OTM course facilitators are modeling best practices in the space in which the teachers will be teaching. Teachers are provided with a copy of the course that they may be teaching. While they're learning how to facilitate in OTM, they have to demonstrate this within their own training course, which allows VHS to approach the teachers at the theory and practice levels. Within OTM the teachers are introduced to the VHS policies as well.

OTM is facilitated by the Supervisor of Instruction as well as one or more Curriculum Coordinators. There are six Curriculum Coordinators total. Sometimes veteran teachers help facilitate. Within OTM, each new teacher is assigned a one-on-one facilitator. During the course, the new teachers will also connect with the VHS Curriculum Coordinator for their subject area who will work with the teachers once they successfully complete OTM and begin facilitating VHS courses.

Once teachers complete OTM successfully, they become Level 1 teachers. Each Level 1 teacher is assigned to a faculty advisor who works with that teacher the first semester she/he teaches for VHS. This faculty advisor has access to the Level 1 teacher's course and provides the teacher with tips and tricks based on her/his performance as a teacher in the course. Teachers are monitored and provided feedback weekly during the 15-week course. VHS has begun to hire veteran teachers as faculty advisors who are supervised by the Supervisor of Instruction. The faculty advisors work with new teachers the first semester they teach a VHS course. The faculty advisor will check in with them every week, contacting the teachers via email to provide a snapshot of their progress and let them know what they have done well and what they might improve. The review form is not shared with new teachers every week; instead, VHS feels it is more important to note where they start and how they

grow and highlight those areas. By the end of the 15 weeks, VHS hopes that the new teachers will be meeting all of the standards and exceeding them in some places. At the end of the semester, the faculty advisors complete a more extensive narrative about the teacher. At this time, based on overall performance, the faculty advisor may recommend that the teacher continue to be mentored on a weekly basis. New teachers are considered Level 1 teachers, while all veteran teachers are considered Level 2. Typically Level 2 teachers are reviewed once a semester. Advisors also have access to end-of-semester student surveys, and will provide guidance and critique to instructors based on student feedback. VHS will sometimes take these surveys and recognize a teacher for doing a stellar job by sending an email to the teacher and to their building administrator. The review forms and surveys are part of the teacher's record so that VHS can have information about past performance and growth of each teacher they employ.

Those first-time teachers who have met the standards sufficiently become Level 2 teachers and transition from their faculty advisors to being mentored by VHS Curriculum Coordinators assigned to the teacher's subject area. Then teachers are evaluated by the Curriculum Coordinators on an ongoing basis and are mentored based on the skills, needs, and performance of the teacher. An internal rating system for Level 2 teachers allows Curriculum Coordinators to provide appropriate levels of support. (See Appendix VHS-3 for Standards for "leveling" people for Level 2 [veteran] teachers.)

VHS offers professional development opportunities in less formal and standardized ways. For example, they have open office hours where teachers can drop in and ask questions. When there is a new system improvement, VHS provides a series of webinars for that tool upgrade. Training is done as needed. Curriculum Coordinators will also hold meetings for those in their discipline. These are typically voluntary since the majority of teachers do not work directly for VHS.

## Evaluate

The in-depth teacher evaluation process that might occur in a face-to-face school differs from VHS's process. It's a delicate balance, and typically the onus of conducting a more formal and possibly mandated evaluation process is on the partner school. VHS does have a probation process for teachers who are consistently not performing to VHS's level of expectation. Depending on the areas in which the teacher is underperforming, the school's administration/principal may need to be involved. The standard VHS member-school contract includes language that makes it clear that VHS has the right to remove a teacher, and the school is responsible for finding a replacement or paying a substitute teacher fee. VHS has a list of performance expectations for their teachers. (See Appendix VHS-1.) For example, VHS runs a daily report to see how often the teachers are signing in, as they are expected to sign in every day, Monday through Friday. (See Weekly Eval Form, Appendix VHS-4.) VHS keeps track of teachers who do not log into their courses for more than two days. Additionally, VHS checks on teachers' grading practices to ensure that they are providing students with feedback on their assignments within a week of the assignment's due date. (See Sample Evaluation, Appendix VHS-5.)

Within the LMS is a space where VHS teachers communicate privately with each of their students. VHS has a record of the teachers' communication in that space and can monitor it to make sure the

teachers are fulfilling the expectation of returning student emails within 24 hours (Monday through Friday). VHS also expects their teachers to participate in discussion boards with their students and that teachers be visible and present in their course(s).

## **Retain**

The retention rate for VHS is more about retaining schools in the consortia than retaining teachers, so they do not formally track teacher retention as it does not make sense to do so for their model.

# Appendix VHS-1

## VHS Teacher Responsibilities

### Teacher Responsibilities

VHS believes in the vital, central role the teacher plays in creating a safe and vibrant learning community within VHS online classrooms. To sustain such classrooms, expectations and requirements must be met within the following instructional areas:

#### 1. General Participation

- Teachers are expected to participate in their courses as fully as they would participate in a traditional classroom course.
- At a minimum, teachers are required to review their course and student participation at least once a day, Monday through Friday.
- Working in a VHS course over the weekend is not required. Many teachers do, however, since student activity often increases over the weekend. In addition, some teachers appreciate the flexibility of working in their VHS courses at night or over the weekend.

#### 2. Discussions

- Teachers must read and monitor all student posts in course discussions regularly throughout each current week.
- Teachers are expected to facilitate group discussions throughout the week. Teachers should have a significant presence contributing substantive posts that deepen the discussion and help students develop critical thinking skills.
- Teachers are required to respond to questions posted by students in their Private Topic discussions (PTs) and in the "Questions" area within 24 hours, Monday through Friday.

#### 3. Grading

- Teachers are required to grade all assignments within one week of the assignment due date.
- At the end of each term, teachers are required to confirm student grades and enter comments for all students in the Student Information System (SIS – [my.vhslearning.org](http://my.vhslearning.org)).
- Teachers are expected to provide substantive, instructive feedback on student work each week.

#### 4. Home Page News Items (Announcements)

- Teachers are required to post a minimum of one comprehensive "Welcome" news item each week at the start of the week. The news item might bridge from the previous week and introduce major themes and topics of the week, and should set a positive tone for students.
- Teachers are expected to post additional news items throughout the week.

#### 5. Communication

- Teachers are expected to respond to communications from students, site coordinators and VHS staff within 24 hours, Monday through Friday.
- Teachers should introduce themselves to their students' Site Coordinators (SCs) via email prior to the start of Week 3 to open a line of communication for the remainder of the course.
- If a student has been absent or not participating for two uninterrupted weeks without a valid reason from his site coordinator (or without having proactively made arrangements with the teacher), the teacher must communicate this to the student's SC and to the VHS Registrar.

## 6. Absences

- When an illness or other emergency prevents a teacher from teaching her/his course for three consecutive school days or less, the teacher should contact her/his VHS curriculum coordinator (in the same way that the teacher would contact a face-to-face school administrator). In such short term instances, VHS will monitor the section for the teacher.
- When there is an extended illness or other emergency that prevents the teacher from teaching her/his course for four consecutive school days or more, the teacher should notify her/his VHS curriculum coordinator immediately via the online ticketing system. The teacher should also alert her/his students via a home page news announcement. VHS administration will work with the school district to place a substitute/replacement teacher within the course. The school district will be subject to a substitute teacher fee.
- Due to the variety of vacation schedules at our member schools, VHS courses do not include scheduled vacations/breaks for teachers or students. Therefore, teachers must schedule accordingly and plan ahead for Internet access during times when their own schedule differs from the standard VHS schedule. Teachers are encouraged to be flexible with their students concerning extended absences (especially when the student reaches out proactively well in advance of the absence).

## 7. Course Revisions

- We expect teachers to put aside time each week well in advance of the following week(s) to preview activities and materials thoroughly prior to students' accessing the week's lessons. This practice not only allows the teacher to re-familiarize her/himself with the content, but is also crucial in checking for broken links or other potential issues. Teachers are encouraged to recommend modifications, fixes and/or improvements to their VHS courses on an ongoing basis via the online ticketing system.

Please note: Teachers who do not meet VHS expectations and requirements for participation will be subject to faculty sanction (see VHS Faculty Sanctions).

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## Appendix VHS-2

### OTM Syllabus

	Topic/ Theme	Objectives	Related Activities
Overview	Course Overview: Introduction to VHS and OTM	<p>Understand the policies, procedures, and expectations of OTM.</p> <p>Understand the role of the facilitator.</p> <p>Learn how to communicate with your facilitator and other participants.</p> <p>Understand the OTM evaluation process.</p> <p>Share your technical background and other information about yourself with your facilitator.</p>	<p>Post a comment to your Private Topic.</p> <p>Complete a Pre-course survey.</p>
Week 1	<b>Online Education: Quality Matters</b>	<p>Learn to navigate D2L.</p> <p>Read about and discuss the traits of effective online learners.</p> <p>Read about and discuss the traits of effective online teacher.</p> <p>Get to know your classmates.</p> <p>Understand copyright laws and how they relate to online courses.</p> <p>Learn about VHS policies via the VHS Handbook.</p> <p>Learn about the VHS Contact Center.</p> <p>Examine your course materials.</p> <p>Explore your VHS course.</p> <p>Read about standards for online courses.</p>	<p>Participate in a discussion about common traits of effective online learners.</p> <p>Participate in a discussion about the traits of effective online teachers.</p> <p>Fill out your student Homepage.</p> <p>File a fake service ticket.</p> <p>Read about the VHS website and Contact Center.</p> <p>Participate in a discussion about VHS policies.</p> <p>Access your course through the "eyes of a student."</p> <p>Search your course for the essential elements of a successful course.</p> <p>Read articles about copyright laws.</p> <p>Search for essential elements for a successful course.</p> <p>Discuss the importance of standards for courses.</p> <p>Watch a video about the state of education through the eyes of students.</p>

Week 2	Engagement and Interaction: Student to Student	<p>Read about strategies for facilitating discussions in online courses</p> <p>Reflect on the effectiveness of discussion activities in your course.</p> <p>Discuss facilitation techniques and assessment in your course.</p> <p>Evaluate the discussions in your course</p> <p>Identify the essential questions in your course</p> <p>Examine the rubrics in your course.</p> <p>Create weekly news items</p> <p>Receive your first evaluation in OTM.</p>	<p>Participate in a discussion about facilitating online discussions.</p> <p>Listen to a podcast about discussions in online courses.</p> <p>Examine your course and critique the types of discussion activities.</p> <p>Personalize a rubric in your course.</p> <p>Complete weekly news items based on essential questions</p>
Week 3	Engagement and Interaction: Building Community	<p>Understand the importance of community in an online learning environment.</p> <p>Reflect on developing community within your course.</p> <p>Begin a group activity</p> <p>Experience the voice board tool.</p> <p>Personalize a document for your course</p>	<p>Participate in a discussion about the importance of building community in a virtual classroom.</p> <p>Evaluate the quality of the community-building activities within your course.</p> <p>Personalize welcome announcement in your course.</p> <p>Participate in an audio discussion about building community</p> <p>Participate in a group activity</p>

Week 4	Teacher Performance: From Sage on the Stage	<p>Investigate learning styles and discuss how online courses can meet the needs of different types of learners.</p> <p>Learn about VHS policies regarding the accommodations needed for students with special needs.</p> <p>Learn about image accessibility.</p> <p>Analyze the types of assessments used within your course.</p> <p>Participate in a group activity.</p> <p>Read about a variety of assessment tools and discuss the effectiveness of different tools.</p> <p>Analyze the process for returning feedback in your course</p> <p>Identify grading strategies that will be used within your course.</p>	<p>Read documents related to VHS policies regarding Special Education and accessibility</p> <p>Participate in a discussion about students with special needs and online courses.</p> <p>Participate in a discussion about the importance and challenges of assessments online.</p> <p>Examine grading strategies in your course</p> <p>Continue working with a small group on a social collaboration project.</p> <p>Examine the types of assessments within your course.</p>
Week 5	Teacher Performance: To Guide on the Side	<p>Understand the important aspects of designing effective online group activities.</p> <p>Identify strategies for improving collaboration in your course.</p> <p>Understand the role of the Site Coordinator</p> <p>Examine the group activities in your course.</p> <p>Read about plagiarism in online courses</p> <p>Complete group activity</p>	<p>Reflect on group activity</p> <p>Participate in class discussion about the elements of successful group activities and identify potential problems related to group work in your course.</p> <p>Participate in a discussion with VHS Site Coordinators</p> <p>Reflect on the group activities in your course.</p> <p>Participate in a discussion about plagiarism and academic honesty in online courses.</p> <p>Complete group collaboration project</p>

Week 6	Being Student Centered	<p>Reflect on the group project and the group process.</p> <p>Understand how to empower students to take responsibility for their learning in an online environment.</p> <p>Learn about the responsibilities of the Mandated Reporter.</p> <p>Learn and discuss best practices in online education.</p> <p>Understand strategies for handling plagiarism within your course.</p> <p>Learn about the VHS faculty resources and expectations.</p> <p>Say goodbye to fellow OTM participants.</p> <p>Reflect on your course and your OTM experience.</p> <p>Learn about the role of your VHS Faculty Advisor</p> <p>Personalize course documents</p> <p>Participate in a final survey about OTM.</p>	<p>Participate in a discussion about the collaborative process</p> <p>Participate in a discussion about best practices in online education.</p> <p>Write a graduation speech for your fellow participants.</p> <p>Create a letter for your future student's Site Coordinators.</p> <p>Create the Teacher Info page for your course.</p> <p>Complete the end of OTM student survey</p> <p>Complete your teacher widget</p> <p>Create a letter for your future student's Site Coordinators.</p> <p>Participate in a discussion about best practices and your future as an online teacher</p>
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## Appendix VHS-3

### Standards for “leveling” people for level 2 (veteran) teachers

Level	Review	Standards
<b>A</b>	1 time a semester	Consistently present in course
		Consistently reliable in responding (and response time) to students.
		Consistently grading assignments on time
		Consistently providing feedback with grades
		Strong skilled voice facilitating discussions and communicating
		Positive evaluation/feedback from students and SCs
		Appropriate and strong tone in discussions and other communications
<b>B</b>	1 time a term	In general managing course issues
		Technically proficient
		Consistently in course but not necessarily consistent in posting to discussions
		Fairly consistent grading assignments
		Minimal feedback with grades
		Adequate, fairly consistent response time to students, but may be beyond the 24 hour time for questions
<b>C</b>	2 times a term	Inflexible with students (late work, etc)
		Long absences from course
		Consistent complaints via ticket from SCs or students
		Inappropriate tone in discussions and/or other communications with students, SCs or VHS staff
		(AP Only)Consistently poor student scores when compared with other sections

## Appendix VHS-4

### Weekly Eval Form

During this evaluation period the Instructor:	SCORE	Exceeds Standard (3 points)	Meets Standard (2 points)	Developing (1 point)	Needs Improvement (0 points)
Maintains a current general News Item (updated at least once a week)		News Items on the homepage meets standard. In addition, teacher consistently posts appropriate additional items each week, maintaining a dynamic presence on the course homepage.	News Items on the homepage are updated and posted on a weekly basis, contain no spelling/grammar errors and are substantive, relevant and engaging for students.	News Items on the homepage are posted on a weekly basis, however they contain spelling/grammar errors and/or could be enhanced to be more substantive, relevant and engaging for students.	News Items on the homepage are not updated on a consistent basis.
Is present in the course		According to course statistics, the instructor consistently checks into the course multiple times/ day, M – F, and also will check into course occasionally on weekends.	According to course statistics, the instructor has checked into the course on a daily basis, M – F.	According to course statistics, the instructor has checked into the course at least 3 days, M – F.	According to course statistics, the instructor has checked into the course fewer than 3 days, M – F.
Responds to student inquiries within 24 hours (M – F)		Student inquiries are consistently responded to well within the 24-hour required period of time M – F.	Student inquiries are responded to within a 24 hour period of time M – F.	Student inquiries are answered, however students may need to wait for more than 24 hours for a response.	Students' questions are not addressed in a timely fashion or there are indications that student frustration is evident.

Is involved in the content discussions and models critical thinking		Instructor posts to the class discussion by consistently asking leading questions, extending student thinking, and contributing relevant, instructive subject matter expertise.	Instructor posts to the class discussion by doing one or more of the following: asking leading questions, extending student thinking, and contributing relevant, instructive subject matter expertise.	Instructor responds to students with simple responses without attempting to challenge or extend student thought.	Instructor is not involved in the content discussions.
Returns grades in a timely manner		All student work is consistently graded throughout the week to allow students the benefit of reading their feedback and integrating the learning while it is still "fresh."	All student work is graded within one week of the due date.	A portion of the students' work is graded within one week of the due date.	Almost none of the students' work is graded within one week of the due date.
Provides written feedback on student work		Students of all abilities are provided with substantive, instructive written feedback on most of their work that provides opportunities to improve or extend their learning.	Students are provided with substantive, instructive, written feedback on select work each week.	Students are provided with written feedback on select work each week.	Instructor does not provide any feedback on student work.
Copy of email sent to instructor:					
<b>Additional notes and explanation of any N/A:</b>					

## Appendix VHS-5

### Sample Faculty Advisor Teacher Evaluation

**Overall assessment:** I (the faculty advisor) recommend the following:

2. The teacher will be monitored less frequently

**During this evaluation period the Instructor:**

	SCORE	<b>Meets Standard (2 points)</b>	<b>Developing (1 point)</b>	<b>Needs Improvement (0 points)</b>
Maintained a current general announcement (updated at least once a week)	2 points	Announcements were updated & posted on a weekly basis <b>and</b> contained no spelling/grammar errors	Announcements were posted on a weekly basis; however they contained spelling/grammar errors <b>or</b> did not pertain to the class as whole	Announcements were not updated, were non-existent, or were missing entirely from view during the weeks under review
Was present in the course	2 points	According to course statistics, the teacher checked into the course on a daily basis, M – F	According to course statistics, the teacher checked into the course at least 3 days, M – F	According to course statistics, the teacher checked into the course fewer than 3 days, M – F
Responded to student inquiries within 24 hours (M – F)	2 points	Student inquiries were responded to within a 24 hour period of time M - F	Student inquiries were answered, however students often waited for more than 24 hours for a response	Students' questions were not addressed in a timely fashion or there were indications that the lack of response was leading to student frustration.
Was involved in the content discussions and modeled critical thinking	1 point	Instructor posts to the class discussion, asking leading questions or extending student thinking	Instructor responds to students with cheerleading types of responses without attempting to challenge or extend student thought	Instructor is not involved in the content discussions. Participation is limited to answering student inquiries.
Returned grades in a timely manner	2 points	All student work was graded within one week from submission	Almost all of the students' work was graded within one week from submission	Almost none of the students' work was graded one week from submission
Provided written feedback on student work	1 point	Students are provided with written feedback on most of their work	Students are provided with occasional written feedback	Instructor does not provide any feedback on student work



Maintained appropriate online voice.	2 points	An appropriate online voice was maintained during all correspondence with students (messages, private threads, discussion areas and/or course discussions).	Teacher demonstrated evidence of understanding the importance of an online voice, but is still working to develop an appropriate online voice	Teacher does not seem to understand what is expected.
Mastered technology needed for students to be successful	1 point	Teacher has mastered technology.	Teacher mastered technology or if issues arose, sought assistance from VHS (either through service tickets or through Faculty Advisor).	Teacher had issues with technology and seemed reluctant to seek assistance. Teacher did not acknowledge or address issues with technology.

## Summative Feedback for Instructor

Teacher X has made great progress in teaching Criminology this fall semester. This was not only his first time teaching an online course but also his first time teaching a Criminology course. Add to these two firsts a semester that was filled with other events such as natural disasters and power outages, and it is easy to see the challenges that Teacher X has faced and surmounted. Job well done!

Teacher X has displayed expertise in using D2L and knew when to ask questions and call for help. He has learned the features of D2L and has become more familiar with the course content and navigation, although blogs and journals still present challenges. He did a wonderful job communicating to the SC's and notifying them of any issues that had arisen or when students were falling behind. He was very supportive of students who were struggling and very good at making accommodations for students with special circumstances.

Teaching an online course is a challenge. Time management for reading, grading, and communicating with students is a skill that teachers rely on to teach the course more smoothly each week. Not only is it crucial to keep up with the current week's work, but also it is important to look carefully at the next week. By previewing the weeks in advance, Teacher X can be proactive in heading off any potential issues. I realize and appreciate that Teacher X has many demands on his time and energy. He made great strides in time management during this semester.

Students are encouraged to complete the VHS Student Survey to provide insight into every course. Some of Teacher X's students had this to say about the Criminology class:

*"...if needed my teacher was flexible in providing me extensions. "*

*"My teacher, Mr. Teacher X, is very fair and humourous. He contributes to our discussions and gives sides of the argument that no one else has thought of. I am very satisfied with this course. It's awesome..."*

Students know good teaching when they experience it and Teacher X provided that experience.

Teacher X was in the course on a consistent basis. He has depth of knowledge from his career as a writer and a friendly online voice that puts students at ease. I would encourage Teacher X to use the News Items to showcase exemplary student work. This small effort can go a long way to enhancing the student-teacher relationship and helps give students a sense of ownership and pride. Create an announcement each week that serves to excite, motivate and inform. As you build a library of clip art or animated gifs, your announcements will become more dynamic and arresting.

Some additional suggestions for Teacher X are:

Get more involved in the discussions to establish a strong and consistent presence. Teacher X has so much knowledge and insight to offer his students. Use summarizing comments, thought provoking questions, and comments that move and shape discussions to improve the level of the discussions. By modeling for students, Teacher X would provide students with ways to make significant, original comments of their own.

Each week, choose at least several assignments to provide feedback for all students. It may be helpful to make a list of some generic comments. For an assignment like a discussion that went particularly well one week, Teacher X could write a generic comment that would be appropriate for all students who participated. There are ways to make providing meaningful and thoughtful feedback more efficient, but it is important to provide feedback to all students each week, especially when the grade is less than satisfactory. Once Teacher X becomes more consistent in providing feedback, he can be more specific and personalize his suggestions and comments for each student.

I appreciate Teacher X's work throughout the fall and hope that he enjoyed this experience in teaching an online course. Thank you, Teacher X, for all you have done to provide a positive learning experience for your students this semester!

# Wisconsin eSchool Network

## KEY FEATURES

WEN is a nonprofit collaborative made up of educators within districts, schools, and programs across the state of Wisconsin.

Districts interested in online learning join WEN to leverage their instructional staff and provide online learning opportunities for their students.

As a consortium, they do not hire, evaluate, or employ any instructional staff. Instead, they help their partners (districts) share instructional staff.

## Introduction

The Wisconsin eSchool Network (WEN) is a nonprofit 501(c)(3) collaborative made up of educators within districts, schools, and programs across the state of Wisconsin. Their mission is “to share high quality online learning resources and best practices while maintaining maximum autonomy for schools and programs to best meet the needs of their local community.” WEN helps districts grow based on the district’s local needs. WEN partners work together “to collaborate, create, and innovate digital learning options.” Districts interested in online learning join WEN to leverage their instructional staff and provide online learning opportunities for their students. When a district becomes a partner, they see what needs the students have and what WEN has to offer in terms of courses. The collaborative is also a space where educators can come together to talk about policy and best practices. Since WEN has a unique structure, their interview questions varied from the general ones shown in Addendum A. See Appendix WEN-1 for the WEN-specific interview questions.

WEN was founded by the Appleton Area and Kiel School Districts in 2002-2003. WEN has served grades 6 through 12 and will be adding K-5 offerings for the 2014-15 school year. WEN currently serves 20 partners. They have two levels of partner involvement including “Invested” and “Affiliate.” They offer nearly 250 different courses. Program governing decisions are made by WEN Invested Member Districts. WEN has purchased perpetual curriculum and licenses content from various vendors. The costs involved in WEN go to expenses for course maintenance, licenses, program development, technical support, resource availability, program administration, operational expenses, and curriculum updates. Wisconsin Virtual School and WEN have varying operational and

instructional program components but collaborate as partners of the Wisconsin Digital Learning Collaborative. For purposes of this study, the data for WEN and Wisconsin Virtual School will be reported separately. (See Appendix WEN-2 and WEN-3 for District Liaison/Registrar Guide for Network Students and Teacher Guide for Network Sections, respectively.)

Table 1 is a snapshot of WEN’s enrollment distribution in their curriculum departments.

**Table 1. WEN’s enrollment distribution by curriculum departments**

Department	All Enrollments	Percentage
Agriculture, food, and natural resources	119	0%
Business and marketing	1176	4%
Communications and audio/visual technology	10	0%
Computer and information sciences	1024	3%
English language and literature	3643	12%
Fine and performing arts	1201	4%
Foreign language and literature	2175	7%
Health care sciences	10	0%
Hospitality and tourism	81	0%
Life and physical science	2611	9%
Mathematics	3362	11%
Miscellaneous	462	2%
Physical, health, and safety education	2925	10%
Religious education and theology	7	0%
Social science and history	4162	14%
Student orientation	6780	23%
Transportation, distribution and logistics	2	0%

### About WEN’s Instructional Staff

WEN has around 300 teachers across 20 collaborative partners (districts). Of the 300, 194 are female. As a consortium, WEN does not hire, evaluate, or employ any instructional staff. Instead, they help their partners (districts) share instructional staff. They have two types of instructional models. The first is local, which equates to local teachers teaching local students. The second is network, which is defined as a teacher teaching or a student taking a course outside of their resident district. Roughly 90% of enrollments are at the local level, while 10% are at network level. Network sections are often called shared or statewide sections as well since the course/teacher is shared across partners throughout the state of Wisconsin. Each year, WEN looks at historical enrollment data to get a sense of what the course/enrollment needs might be, and then WEN reaches out to their partners to find out what teachers are available to teach the courses. This process is ongoing, starting in February and lasting through the following year as changes are made to accommodate master schedule changes.

An online survey was used to collect additional data on some of the WEN teachers. A few districts refused to send out the survey to teachers due to district IRB constraints, so the representative response is less than it could be if all teachers could be asked to take the survey. Sixty-nine teachers out of a possible 300 responded. Table 2 shows the breakdown of the ethnicity of the teachers, while Table 3 shows their educational background.

**Table 2. Ethnicity**

Ethnicity	Frequency	Percentage
Hispanic or Latino	2	3.0%
Asian	-	-
Black or African American	-	-
American Indian or Alaska Native	1	1.5%
White	65	97.0%
Other	-	-

**Table 3. Highest degree earned**

Degree	Frequency	Percentage
Bachelor's degree	18	26.0%
Master's degree	48	69.6%
Professional degree – Ed.S.	3	4.4%
Doctorate degree – Ph.D., Ed.D., M.D.	-	-

When asked if they had ever taught face-to-face, 98.5% said yes. When asked if they currently teach face-to-face, 68.1% said yes. Table 4 shows the grade levels that the instructional staff are teaching/ have taught face-to-face. Table 5 shows the subjects that the instructors have taught/are currently teaching face-to-face.

**Table 4. Grade levels taught face-to-face**

Grade Levels	Frequency	Percentage
K-2	10	14.7%
3-5	15	22.1%
6-8	35	51.5%
9-12	60	88.2%
Higher Ed	17	25.0%

**Table 5. Subjects taught face-to-face**

Subject	Frequency
English	22
World Languages	3
Math	23
Science	14
Social Studies	19
Other*	33

\* Other – Life Skills, Special Education, Health, Family and Consumer Science, Alternative Education, Elementary Education, Reading, Physical Education, Computer Science, Business, Marketing, Graduate Counseling, English as a Second Language, Humanities, Music

When asked how many online courses teachers had taken for credit, for a degree and/or for professional development purposes, the median number of classes taken was five while the lowest was zero and the maximum was 36. When asked how many years the teachers had been teaching online, the median number of years was 4.3, with a maximum of 19 years and a minimum of 0. When asked how many years they had been teaching for Wisconsin eSchool Network, the median was 3 years with a maximum of 13 and a minimum of 0. Table 6 shows the grade levels that instructional staff are teaching or have taught online. Table 7 shows the subjects that the instructors have taught/ are currently teaching online.

**Table 6. Grade levels taught online**

Grade Levels	Frequency	Percentage
Elementary	11	16.3%
Middle	24	36.9%
High	58	89.2%
Higher Ed	8	12.3%

**Table 7. Subjects taught online**

Subject	Frequency
English	20
World Languages	3
Math	19
Science	12
Social Studies	18
Other*	25

\* Other – Health, Personal Finance, Life Skills, Career Development, Credit Recovery, Computer, Business, Computer Science, Special Education, Physical Education, Teacher Professional Development, Music, Elementary Education

The majority of the instructors are located in Wisconsin. Table 8 illustrates the counties in which the teachers reside. Three teachers reported that they live outside of Wisconsin, within the following cities and states: Gurnee, Illinois; Highwood, Illinois; and River Forest, Illinois.

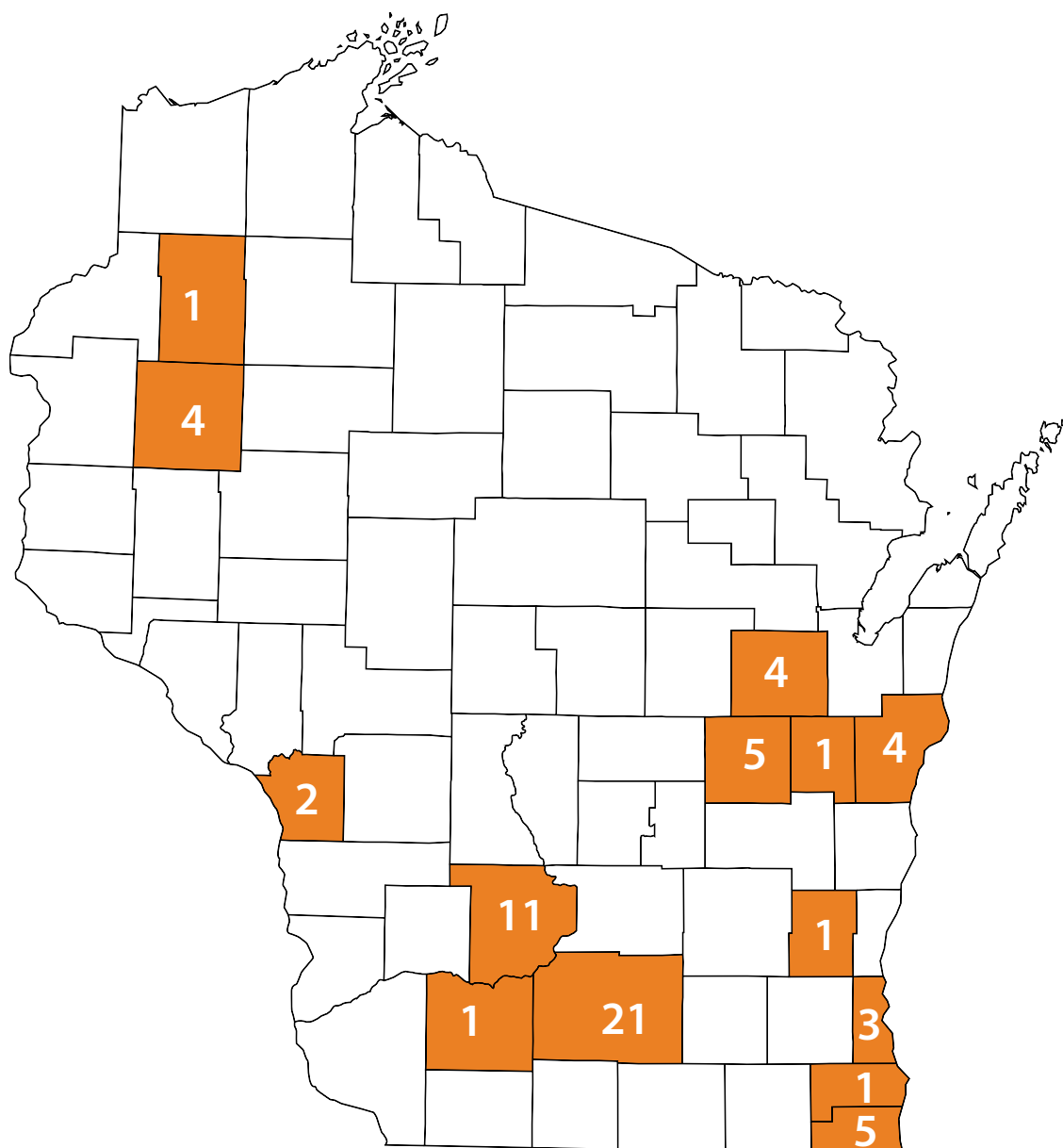
**Table 8. Instructor locations in Wisconsin by county (ordered by high to low frequency)**

County (WI)	Cities	# of Instructors
Dane	Oregon (6), Madison (4), Middleton (4), Waunakee (3), Verona (2), Blanchardville, Cross Plains	21
Sauk	Baraboo (9), Reedsburg, Sauk City	11
Kenosha	Kenosha	5
Winnebago	Oshkosh	5
Barron	Rice Lake (3), Cameron	4
Manitowoc	Kiel (3), Manitowoc	4
Outagamie	Appleton	4
Milwaukee	Milwaukee (2), Wauwatosa	3
La Crosse	Holmen, Onalaska	2
Racine	Burlington	1
Calumet	Hilbert	1
Iowa	Arena	1
Washburn	Birchwood	1
Washington	Kewaskum	1

\*Number in parentheses is the number of instructors from that city. If there is only one instructor from a location, parentheses are not used after a city.

The map below shows the instructors' distribution per county across the state of Wisconsin.

**Map. WEN instructors per county in the state of Wisconsin**





## Recruit & Hire

WEN does not consult with their partner schools on the hiring of teachers. Instead, WEN leaves the hiring up to their partners (districts). Within districts, there are varying models of instructional employment. For example, there are teachers who teach face-to-face in traditional schools and teach online for WEN; there are teachers who are consultants for their school districts and work for WEN as part of that consultancy; and some teachers are hired by a district to teach part-time in their supplemental program offered through WEN. These programs have different ways of hiring and managing their instructional staff. On the front end of recruiting, WEN does not have conversations with their partners about what to look for when hiring and/or selecting teachers to teach online. While there are baseline expectations that WEN distributes to the partners, the final say in hiring is up to the partner. (See Appendices B & C.)

Every teacher that is teaching for WEN goes through a background check and must be a Wisconsin-certificated teacher. Appendices B and C explain the expectations that WEN has for its instructional staff. WEN is not involved in evaluating instructional staff. The evaluation process is the partner's responsibility.

## Train & Support

Wisconsin was one of the first states to have a requirement for teachers to acquire professional development in online learning before they teach online. In 2008, Wisconsin required all teachers who plan to teach online to have 30 hours of professional development in online learning.<sup>1</sup> This spawned the creation of a 3-credit course called "Taming the World of Online Learning," which WEN offers to partners. Last year, the Wisconsin legislation repealed the 2008 requirement because the government expects the districts to have appropriate professional development for their teachers. WEN still requires all of the instructors to take the 3-credit course before they teach online.

WEN has a train-the-trainer model of teacher training within each of their partner districts. They also provide on-demand operations and system training when needed. They do an annual professional development (PD) day where all of the instructional staff and partners come together to learn face-to-face. This PD is teacher-focused. The topics include Common Core, standards, systems, content, engagement, intervention, registration, student support, and more. This year, WEN started a professional learning community (PLC) through Google Sites. The PLC meets four times a year with the different collaborative partners. Teachers also have support from their local district liaison (DL) as well as WEN. The DL is the authority figure at the district. Instead of working directly with the teachers and the students when a problem arises, WEN deals directly with the DL to resolve the problem.

For full-time teachers, WEN tries to keep to a ratio of 25 students to one teacher per section of a course and emphasizes that teachers should not teach more than five sections. The teachers do not design curriculum; rather, WEN uses pre-packaged curriculum. However, the teachers have 100% control over the content for remediating, customizing, and supplementing purposes.

1 <https://docs.legis.wisconsin.gov/2007/related/acts/222>

The compensation model for teachers teaching students outside of their district falls to local policy. It is important to clarify that WEN does not reimburse teachers directly. The \$260 is reimbursed to the district rather than directly to a teacher. The \$260 per .5 credit course enrollment (i.e. 1 student taking 3 courses =  $\$260 \times 3 = \$780$ ) is reimbursed to each partnering district to offset or cover their local financial obligation for providing an instructor to the Network. Local district compensation policies vary from traditional FTE-based compensation to per enrollment compensation varying in amount. Some programs average less; some average more than the agreed upon reimbursement depending on each program's delivery model, teacher availability, and policy. This agreed upon amount was determined by collaborating partner administrators as well as the Wisconsin Education Association Council. Collaboratively the group used a full-time teacher's compensation package equivalent to \$65,000. They then divided it by five sections, divided by 25 students, and finally divided by two semesters.

Of their 20 partners, 60% of them have policies specific about online learning while the others apply traditional environment policy for their online learning space. Around 42% of the partners require the 30-hour PD; 30% have mentors for online teachers; 20% have yearly in-service trainings specific to online teaching.

## Challenges

There are four primary challenges that WEN faces. The first is at their network level and relates to managing policies that differ from one partner to the next; for instance, when a teacher from one district is teaching a student in another and the policies at the student's school are different from those at the teacher's district. Thus, often issues arise, especially when it comes to late work, truancy, etc. The second challenge is helping new teachers engage their students. The third challenge is having 20 partners that have a variety of philosophies on everything to do with education, whether it is quality, instructional strategies, or engagement, for example. It is hard to get all partners on the same page. The fourth challenge is the difficulty in creating an equitable master instructional schedule with so many partners.

# Appendix WEN-1

## SVSLA Teacher Study

### WEN Interview Questions

1. Describe your current instructional staff. Do you have any information about the demographics of your teachers?
  - a. How many teachers do you have? Which subjects do they teach?
  - b. How many male and female instructors do you have?
  - c. Where do your teachers live? Are they in-state and/or out-of-state? Are they across the state, country? Concentrated in one area of the state?
  - d. Do you regularly track any of this information? If so, do the demographics change over time? If yes, how have they changed, and why? Based on this question, do you track the following items and why?:
    - i. *Teacher Certification*
    - ii. *Education*
    - iii. *Employment History*
    - iv. *Technology access*
    - v. *Internet access*
    - vi. *Software they are comfortable using*
    - vii. *Experience related to OL/BL and any courses taken online or taught online*
    - viii. *Background checks*
    - ix. *Biographical sketch a description of their experiences*
    - x. *Teaching strategies*
    - xi. *Special talents which contribute to their success and that of their students when teaching online)*
2. What strategy(ies) do you use to recruit teachers?
3. What have you found to be the most effective strategy(ies) when recruiting teachers for your program?
4. Who makes the final decisions about hiring? How does that person make the final decision? What does he/she take into account?
5. What teacher criteria do you use for districts to provide teachers to the collaborative?
6. How do new hires go through HR? What are the processes there? How do other processes get triggered by hiring, such as creation of credentials for all of their system accounts?

7. Does every teacher go through a background check?
8. Once teachers are hired, how do you determine the proper amount to train new teachers?
  - a. Is there a new teacher training? What does that new teacher training entail? Do all teachers receive the same new teacher training? If so, how long is it? How is it delivered, and what does each course/section entail? How has it changed over time? Why were those changes made?
  - b. What topics are covered in new teacher training?
  - c. Who provides the new teacher training?
  - d. Is there a mentoring program for new teachers? Please explain.
  - e. What are the biggest hurdles for new candidates?
  - f. What are some common issues that new teachers bring up?
  - g. In your opinion, how long does it take a good teacher to get up to speed?
  - h. If we were to ask one of your online instructors that same question, what would some of the online instructors say to that? (Could I talk to a few of the instructors? If so, could you send me contact info for a few of them? Maybe a couple that are newer and a couple that have been with your program for awhile?)
9. Are there professional development/training opportunities available to teachers beyond the new teacher training?
  - a. If so, what do those include?
  - b. Are those mandatory/voluntary/go toward CEUs?
  - c. Who is responsible for providing the training?
  - d. What topics are covered in the ongoing PD/training opportunities?
10. What staffing model do you use?
  - a. Do you use contract teachers? If so, how does that work?
  - b. Are teachers full-time?
  - c. Do you have future plans to change your staffing model? If you are considering this, what would you change it to and why?
11. What teacher support structures do you currently use?
  - a. Do you have a teacher mentoring program? If so, please describe how it works.
  - b. Do you have communities of practice? If so, please describe how it/they work(s).

12. What percentage of instructors do you retain from year to year?
13. How do you retain teachers?
  - a. Are there particular strategies you use?
  - b. If so, what are those strategies, and what do you think are the most effective strategies?
  - c. Please describe any challenges you face with retaining teachers.
  - d. What factors are there that cause teachers to sign back on/not sign back on with your program?
14. Is there anything you'd like to talk about that I haven't asked about?
15. Could you send me a copy of anything that you would like to highlight in this write-up, such as an evaluation form, staffing model, etc that has worked really well?
16. What are the baseline expectations you require as a consortium?
17. What are the legislative requirements for online learning and the history of this in Wisconsin?
18. What are the challenges, issues, and successes, of your teacher model given the unique nature of a consortium model?

## Appendix WEN-2

### WEN District Liaison/Registrar Guide for Network Sections

The following check list is meant to support the District Liaison (DL) and Registrar when working with network sections and provide consistency in support of students. It is based off the Wisconsin eSchool Network (WEN) Policies and Procedures which guides the Operations of WEN.

The resident district ultimately is responsible for awarding credit. Resident districts are responsible for ensuring the student is academically successful under resident district policy.

#### Instructors for Network Sections

1. WEN members will ensure instructors teaching Network sections have had appropriate training and professional development.
2. Network instructors must have at minimum taught one local online section prior to serving as a Network instructor. Special circumstances will be considered.

#### Coaches/Mentors/Legs for Network Sections

1. The DL or Registrar is responsible to assign a coach in Genius who will monitor student progress.
2. The coach is responsible to communicate student levels of support to the instructor.
3. The coach should monitor progress reports and may send emails/resports to students and guardians as needed.
4. If the coach is unable to engage with an instructor, then the coach should use professional judgment on when to reach out to the local District Liaison raising concern.
5. The local DL will use professional judgment on when to reach out the network teacher's DL (or vice versa).
6. Once each of these items has been exhausted, please contact the WEN Online Learning Coordinator (OLC) or Director.

#### Enrolling in a Network Section

1. No bulk enrolling to network sections
2. Please enroll within one week of the start date (no sooner)

#### Wait Lists for Network Sections

1. A wait list will be started when all network section is at capacity or closed
2. If the designated as a network section in collaboration with the OLC
3. Preference will be given to districts with a negative equity balance

#### Start/End Dates for Network Sections

1. Communication between instructor of network section and student's mentor/coach must occur when changing start and end dates.
2. Network section course completions should be completed by the last school day in May unless special arrangements are made or the course is designated as a yearlong course.

#### Final Exams for Network Sections

1. The coach will assign a proctor for the Final Exam and communicate that with the student
2. The "Ready for Exam" Flag will indicate when a student has been cleared by the teacher to take the Final Exam.
3. Final Exams are password protected and proctored. They must be passed per resident district policy.
4. Network policy recommends: "Passing final exam with a minimum of 60%"
5. The proctor, coach, DL, or registrar can find the password in Genius.
6. Passwords should remain secure and not given to a student.
7. If a student fails the exam, coach or DL will collaborate with the teacher to determine if a retake is possible and if/when that will occur.

#### Completing/Dropping Students in a Network Section

1. Students will show a Dropped\_Grace on their historical records if dropped within 30 days for financial purposes. After 30 days, students will show Dropped on their historical records. (Note: Fees may still apply to partner licensed content).
2. Keep communication open to the other district involved when dropping a student from network sections
3. Once a student passes the final exam, wait for the "Ready for Completion" or "Needs Review" Flag to be set before completing a student. Work to reduce time crunch issues when possible.
4. Communicate with the network teacher/DL when a student must be completed quickly.
5. Changes and modifications to this final grade may arise on an individual student basis. DL's are encouraged to proactively communicate with the instructor when these situations arise.
6. If a student fails the course, the teacher can mark Ready for Completion and put the final failing grade.
7. The local program will determine if the student is Dropped or Completed from the course depending on their local policy.
8. Determine how often your program will check for Completed students and complete/drop them in a timely manner.

## Summer School for Network Sections

1. Summer school sections made available to the network will be set with “Ongoing” terms. However, districts will define one of the following course completion hard end date: 1) Last weekday in July, 2) Last weekday in August, or 3) ongoing with no hard end date.
2. Students will show a Dropped\_Grace on their historical records if dropped within 30 days for financial purposes. After 30 days, students will show Dropped on their historical records. (Note: Fees may still apply to partner licensed content). Although the 30 day grace period still applies for financial purposes, programs enrolling in students in Network sections will to the best of their ability abide by a 10 day grace period to minimize instructor interventions in an already shortened enrollment period.
3. Partners providing Summer School Sections will ensure instructors have appropriate expectations during the summer months. Minimum instructor expectations will include but are not limited to:
  - a. Student/parent response within 1 school day per state statute regardless of vacation schedule (1 school day during the summer is non-holiday weekdays)
  - b. Grading is much more intensive because of full courses being condensed in a smaller timeframe. Instructor should expect to be heavily engaged in grading, student communication, and individualized support based on student need (as above grading turnaround of no more than 3 school days)
  - c. All programs providing Summer School Network Sections are required to have a DL on staff and available during the summer months.
4. Partners enrolling students into Summer School Network Sections will ensure:
  - a. Student placement is appropriate (if they struggled in Alg. 1 during the year, success is unlikely in a summer school session with a more condensed enrollment timeframe)
  - b. All programs enrolling students into Network Sections are required to have a local DL and Coach on staff providing local oversight, intervention, and support for Network enrollments.

\* WVS enrollments currently have some unique parameters. Please refer to the following links for more information.

\* All federal, state, and local policies will be followed in relation to Mandatory Reporting, Special Education, and 504's.



## Appendix WEN-3

### WEN Teacher Guide for Network Sections

The following checklist is meant to support teachers of network sections and provide consistency in support of students. It is based off the Wisconsin eSchool Network (WEN) Policies and Procedures which guides the Operations of WEN.

#### Beginning Course Setup Checklist for Network Sections

1. Add contact information to the Welcome Folder.
2. Add supplemental resources, screencasts to the Welcome Folder or Course as needed.
3. Set the password for the final exam.
4. Consider adding announcements to courses. Announcements are meant for periodic communication to all students in a course.

#### Initial Work with Students in Network Sections

1. Have initial two-way communication (examples: "Welcome" logged in Genius, phone, email, online meeting, etc). Be sure to cover special information for your course.
2. Establish communication boundaries with students so they know how and when to contact you. This includes discussing phone number, times to call, office hours (if any), announcements, discussion-based (oral) assessments, discussion threads, progress reports, etc.
3. Cover exam expectations (proctored, password protected, and passing finals).
4. Review the Gradebook and Due Dates.
5. Remind students of any Academic Integrity policies in your course.
6. Ask questions to get to know the student and why they are taking your class.

#### Grading Expectations in Network Sections

1. Teachers should model consistent work in their courses by responding to communication and homework in a timely manner. Teachers should average no more than 3 schools days in grading turnaround.
2. Teachers are responsible for validating assessments (oral, proctored, retakes, etc.).
3. Teachers are encouraged to allow resubmissions when appropriate.
4. When assignments are overdue and not completed, you may enter zeroes based on professional judgment.
5. Course completions will be percentage grades. The resident district is responsible for awarding credit and the final grade based on the grade assigned by the teacher.

### Progress Reports in Network Sections

1. Teachers should provide support and intervention with students directly.
2. Progress reports should be sent at minimum twice per month.
3. Progress reports should be sent to the student, guardian, and coach.

### Lines of Communication in Network Sections

1. Teachers should average no more than 3 schools days in responding to a student/guardian.
2. Teachers should work with the student's coach to provide intervention and support to students.
3. If a teacher can't resolve an issue with a student/guardian, the teacher should contact the coach or DL when appropriate.
4. If a student does not have a coach, the teacher should let the District Liaison know, who will then contact the other district for more information.
5. When issues around academic integrity surface, teachers are responsible to communicate directly with the resident district (which could include student, guardian, coach, and/or DL) and provide appropriate documentation.

### Final Exams in Network Sections

1. Final Exams are password protected and proctored. They must be passed per resident district policy.
2. Network policy recommends "Passing final exam with a minimum of 60%."
3. When a student is ready to take the final exam, put the password and notes for the exam in Genius in the Comments under Current Enrollments AND change the FLAG to "Ready for Exam."
4. Email the student, guardian, and coach that the student is ready for the exam (Do not give students/guardians the password).
5. If a student fails the exam, work with the local program to determine if a retake is possible and how/when that will occur.

### Completing Students in a Course in Network Sections

1. Once a student passes the final exam, change the following information under Current Enrollments:
  - a. The final grade should be in Current Grade AND listed under Comments.
  - b. Change the FLAG to "Ready for Completion."
2. If a student fails the course, you can mark Ready for Completion and put the final failing grade.
3. The local program will determine if the student is Dropped or Completed from the course depending on their local policy.

4. Network enrollments end dates should be set no later than the last school day in May except for classes designated year-long or when special arrangements are made. The intent is to provide some cushion of time in extenuating circumstances.

#### Summer School Teacher Expectations

1. Partners providing Summer School Sections will ensure instructors have appropriate expectations during the summer months. Minimum instructor expectations will include but are not limited to:
  - a. Student/parent response within 1 school day per state statute regardless of vacation schedule (1 school day during the summer is non-holiday weekdays).
  - b. Grading is much more intensive because of full courses being condensed in a smaller timeframe. Instructor should expect to be heavily engaged in grading, student communication, and individualized support based on student need (as above grading turnaround of no more than 3 school days).
  - c. All programs providing Summer School Sections are required to have a DL on staff and available during the summer months.

\* WVS enrollments currently have some unique parameters. Please refer to the following links for more information.

\* All federal, state, and local policies will be followed in relation to Mandatory Reporting, Special Education, and 504's.

# Wisconsin Virtual School

## KEY FEATURES

CESA 9's Wisconsin Virtual School (WVS) and Wisconsin eSchool Network have partnered with the Department of Public Instruction to create equitable high quality resources available throughout Wisconsin – this collaborative partnership is called the Wisconsin Digital Learning Collaborative (WDLC).

After teachers apply, the staff invites candidates to teacher training to see how well they collaborate with others and how tech savvy they are.

Professional Learning Communities meet four times a year and provide at least one professional development opportunity per month.

Surveys are sent to the Local Education Guides (LEGS), Coaches, and Mentors working to support students in their online experience in districts as well as to the students. These surveys provide feedback to WVS on teachers that are teaching their courses.

## Introduction

The *Wisconsin Virtual School (WVS)* “is a supplemental online course provider that partners with school districts throughout Wisconsin, to offer online courses to middle and high school students. WVS has been operated out of CESA 9 since 2000 and has served over 25,000 enrollments to date, with over half of Wisconsin’s school districts participating in the program.”<sup>1</sup> In 2014, “CESA 9’s Wisconsin Virtual School (WVS) and Wisconsin eSchool Network have partnered with the Department of Public Instruction to create equitable high quality resources to be available throughout Wisconsin – this collaborative partnership is called the Wisconsin Digital Learning Collaborative (WDLC).”<sup>2</sup>

## About WVS’s Instructional Staff

WVS does not have any part-time or full-time positions with benefits. Teachers are hired as independent contractors. Their staff consists of the Executive Director of WVS, WVS Director, WVS Associate Director, and two Program Assistants; these positions make up a total of 3.5 FTEs. WVS has 51 contracted teachers who teach core content and electives for both middle and high school. A full list of the courses taught at WVS can be found at <http://www.wisconsinvirtualschool.org/courses.cfm>. Out of the 51 total teachers, 36 are female. Some are teachers in a traditional school and work for WVS part-time, while other teachers are retired or are stay-at-home parents. Most teachers teach up to six classes, and the teachers who are full-time at a traditional school teach one to two classes per semester. Wisconsin has 30 virtual

1. CESAs “serve educational needs in all areas of Wisconsin by serving as a link between school districts and between school districts and the state. Cooperative Educational Service Agencies may facilitate communication and cooperation among all public and private schools, agencies, and organizations that provide services to pupils.” (Wisconsin State Statute, Chapter 116, 1983)
2. <http://www.wisconsinvirtualschool.org/wdlchome.cfm>

charter schools in the state, so there is no discussion within WVS regarding serving grades K-5 in the future. However, there have been discussions about providing infrastructure and potentially content to district grade K-5 teachers around the state to use with their face-to-face students in a blended model.

An online survey was administered to the WVS teachers. Forty-nine out of the current 51 instructors completed the survey. The data is shared below. The ethnicity of the staff who responded to the survey is 100% White. Table 1 shows their educational background.

**Table 1. Highest degree earned**

Degree	Frequency	Percentage
Bachelor's degree	14	27.5%
Master's degree	23	66.7 %
Professional degree – Ed.S.	0	-
Doctorate degree – Ph.D., Ed.D., M.D.	2	5.6%

The median number of classes that teachers have taken online for a degree and/or professional development purposes is six courses. When asked if they had ever been a face-to-face teacher, all but one said they had. When asked if they taught face-to-face currently, 53.1% said yes. Table 2 shows the grade levels that the instructional staff are teaching/have taught face-to-face.

**Table 2. Grade levels taught face-to-face**

Grade Levels	Frequency	Percentage
K-2	9	18.8%
3-5	11	22.9%
6-8	30	62.5%
9-12	48	100.0%
Higher Ed	19	39.6%

Table 3 shows the subjects that the instructors have taught/are currently teaching face-to-face.

**Table 3. Subjects taught face-to-face**

Subject	Frequency
English	9
World Languages	10
Math	10
Science	10
Social Studies	11
Other*	18

\* Other – Technology, Business Education, Computers, Health, Physical Education, Art, Photography, Music.

The staff’s median years of teaching online was 8 years with a minimum of 1 year and a maximum of 26 years. When asked how many years they had been teaching at WVS specifically, the median was 6.4, maximum was 14, and minimum was 1 year. Table 4 shows the grade levels that instructional staff are teaching or have taught online. Table 5 shows the subjects that the instructors have taught/are currently teaching online.

**Table 4. Grade levels taught online**

Grade Levels	Frequency	Percentage
K-2	0	--
3-5	0	--
6-8	24	49.0%
9-12	48	98.0%
Higher Ed	10	20.4%

**Table 5. Subjects taught online**

Subject	Frequency
English	6
World Languages	10
Math	7
Science	8
Social Studies	7
Other*	20

\* Other – Technology, AP courses, Life Skills, Business Education, Computer Science, Health, Physical Education, Music, Programming

The majority of the instructors are located in Wisconsin. Table 6 illustrates the counties in which the teachers reside. Seven teachers reported that they live outside of Wisconsin, within the following cities and states: Big Pine Key, Florida (2); Crystal Falls, Michigan (2), Caspian, Michigan; Goshen, Indiana; and Chicago, Illinois.

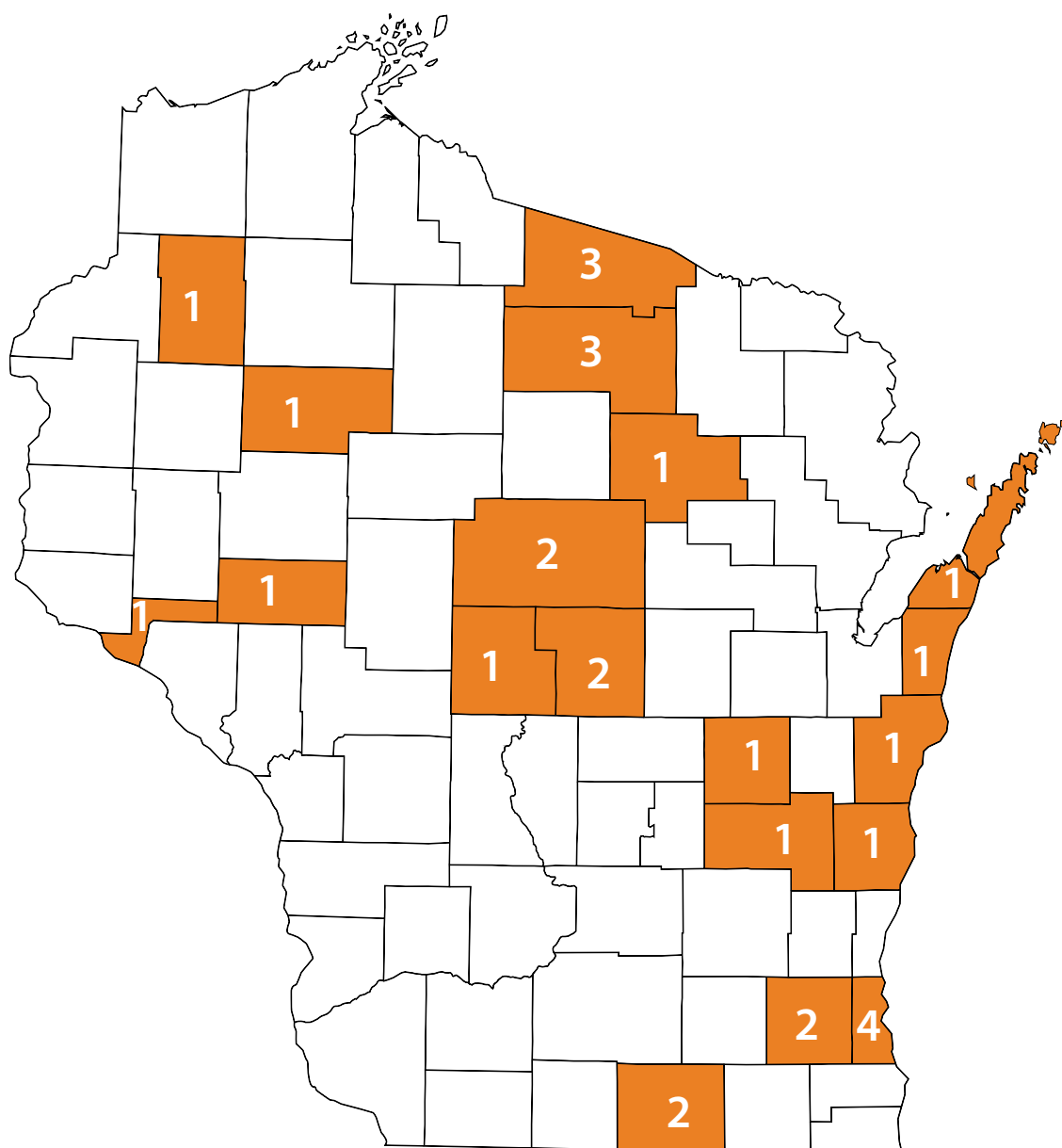
**Table 6. Instructor locations in Wisconsin by county (ordered by high to low frequency)**

County (WI)	Cities	# of Instructors
Milwaukee	Milwaukee (4), Brown Deer, Grand View, South Milwaukee	7
Vilas	Eagle River (3), Phelps	4
Oneida	Rhinelander	3
Rock	Janesville (2), La Prairie	3
Waukesha	Lisbon, Sussex, Waukesha	3
Manitowoc	Kiel, Manitowoc	2
Marathon	Kronenwetter, Wausau	2
Portage	Stevens Point	2
Winnebago	Neenah	2
Brown	Ashwaubenon	1
Calumet	Hilbert	1
Door	Fish Creek	1
Eau Claire	Eau Claire	1
Fond du Lac	Ripon	1
Kewaunee	Kewaunee	1
Langlade	Antigo	1
Marinette	Pembine	1
Pepin	Durand	1
Rusk	Ladysmith	1
Sheboygan	Plymouth	1
Washburn	Shell Lake	1
Wood	Wisconsin Rapids	1

\*Number in parentheses is the number of instructors from that city. If there is only one instructor from a location, parentheses are not used after a city.

The following map shows the instructors' distribution per county across the state of Wisconsin.

**Map. WVS instructors per county in the state of Wisconsin**





## Recruit & Hire

To recruit teachers, WVS uses word of mouth, current teacher referrals, direct inquiries (email, phone calls, etc.), website link<sup>3</sup>, and direct newsletters to superintendents and mentors/guides at local districts. WVS staff has also visited school districts. The primary methods that have worked most effectively are word of mouth and current teacher referrals. Based on their applications, more and more prospective WVS teachers are coming directly out of their teacher education program; however, WVS prefers to hire those teachers who have had teaching experiences beyond their teacher education program.

The employment application is online<sup>4</sup>. On the application, WVS asks teachers what technologies they are comfortable using. While they ask if an applicant has taken or taught an online course, it is not a requirement for employment. They look at the courses that the teacher is interested in teaching, the teacher's licensure (to see what they are qualified to teach and make sure they have the 6-12 or 7-12 experience and qualifications), and to see if they have taken the 30-hour foundational course for online teaching (either via WVS, Online Teaching Associates [OTA]), or Online Facilitation (OFTWOL) from Wisconsin eSchool Network (WEN). Topics within the course include: how to communicate with students and build a collaborative community; how to group content together in a digestible way; online pedagogy; what they know about online learning; skills in technology infrastructure used; legal, social and ethical issues; and facilitation skills. While the applicants list their credentials through the online application, follow-up materials need to be sent outside of the system directly to WVS. These follow-up materials include licensure, professional development certificates, and transcripts. Once these follow-up materials are received and processed by WVS staff, the prospective teacher moves onto the next step in the interview process – invitation to teacher training.

WVS invites the teacher applicants to a face-to-face WVS teacher training and uses this opportunity to get to know the applicants, assess their technology skills, and observe how they collaborate with others. It also offers the candidate time to ask questions of the current instructional staff and gives the instructional staff time to weigh in on potential new hires. Following the training session, if the candidate moves forward to the next stage of the process, he/she will sit down with the Executive Director and Director who will answer any additional questions the candidate has. This also gives the WVS staff a chance to ask questions specific to their interactions with the candidate during the teacher training. While final decisions are made by the Executive Director, she also gets input from her Director as well as her team of instructional staff. A background check is conducted before an offer is made to a teacher.

3. <http://www.wisconsinvirtualschool.org/employment.cfm>

4. [http://www.wisconsinvirtualschool.org/about/TeacherAppForm2014\\_distributed.pdf](http://www.wisconsinvirtualschool.org/about/TeacherAppForm2014_distributed.pdf)

## Train & Support

Once hired, the teachers attend a face-to-face training. This training allows the instructional staff time to ensure the teachers have a chance to navigate the technologies and ask questions as they explore the new systems. It also gives staff an opportunity to get real-time, individualized feedback regarding the support that the teachers need to use the systems and work with students. There are 2 days of training done face-to-face and another 2-day equivalent of time done in an online synchronous conferencing tool. WVS meets with its teachers face-to-face once a year. The veteran teachers are not required to attend this training; however, some attend in order to share their tips, tricks, and strategies with the new instructors. The topics covered in the 30-hour training, which typically occurs in August, includes the student information system, learning management system, conferencing tool, plagiarism tool, curriculum packages, WVS policies, teacher expectations, communication strategies, digital citizenship, net etiquette, student engagement, time management, teacher support/troubleshooting, community building, progress monitoring, office hours, progress reporting, etc. Since WVS uses six different content providers, they do not spend too much time helping teachers learn to design content because the content is given to them. However, they do spend time teaching them how to differentiate content for students who are having difficulty with the way the content is initially presented.

Once off-site, the teachers must have Internet access and email. Typically, getting up to speed, for new teachers especially, takes up to a year. During the training, a handful of teachers decide that online teaching is not for them. WVS provides a mentor for new teachers for their first year. They try to pair new teachers with someone from their content area. They also have a space in Google Communities that allows the teachers to get together and reflect, ask questions, and learn from one another.

In their first year, teachers are encouraged to take their time to get to know the content, become familiar with the set-up of the course, and reflect on how to modify it. The WVS staff has also put together videos and training tutorials for just-in-time training. Because of their use of six content providers, the WVS staff has begun training teachers in troubleshooting techniques so that the teachers can work out technology issues on their own. The teachers are also expected to help their students troubleshoot.

Another hurdle that new teachers and sometimes even experienced WVS teachers encounter is having to learn the differences in policies between their school district and WVS, such as plagiarism or assignment extensions. Often these differ, and WVS staff spend time making sure that teachers understand the WVS policy is there to support them. They also encourage conversations with the local district about implementation of the WVS policy or the local district policy.

There are also Professional Learning Communities that meet four times a year and at least one professional development opportunity a month. The topics covered are typically content that the teachers need at that particular time, such as Common Core integration. Usually, the experienced teachers are the ones who provide the training to the other teachers. The synchronous web conferencing tool is used so that the professional development can be recorded.

Additionally, each summer WVS works with the Virtual School Leadership Alliance to provide 5-6 hours of training in June, July, and August. Attending these provides teachers with the opportunity to earn graduate credits. The state virtual schools get together and decide what their teachers need in terms of training and then design the training to meet those needs. These training sessions are recorded and added to a shared resource space so that all of the state schools can go back and use the content at any time. WVS also has an internal professional development area that houses past webinars and allows WVS staff to see what topics teachers are looking for help in so they can reach out and provide specific support.

## Evaluate

WVS does not have any formal evaluation process as teachers are hired on a consultant contract to perform certain job duties. This contract can be terminated if these duties are not being met. This differs from full- or part-time employees who fall under yearly performance evaluations, like the WVS Office Staff. In addition to the Teacher Consultant Expectations, informal evaluation input is provided. This includes checking in with teachers and looking for key expectations that mirror the *INACOL Quality Standards for Online Teaching*. They have created a checklist (see Appendix WI-1) that ensures the teachers set up their course, follow-up with students, grade student work, add welcome folders, send weekly progress reports, hold weekly synchronous office hours, etc. The checklist is filled out by the Director at the beginning of each semester. Teachers' emails are logged, and the synchronous office hours are documented within the system as well; thus, despite there being no formal evaluation process, there are clear checks and balances that the WVS staff can employ to ensure the teachers are working with their students in a manner that matches WVS's expectations. When the WVS staff hear or see an issue developing, they respond. The teachers are expected to respond to emails within 24-48 hours and must provide feedback on student assignments within 72 hours. They also have to notify students when they'll be away for an extended amount of time.

WVS also distributes surveys to the Local Education Guides (LEGS), Coaches, and Mentors working to support students in their online experience in districts as well as to the students. These anonymous surveys provide feedback to WVS on teachers that are teaching their courses. The response rate is low on both the LEG and student surveys historically. They have had approximately 125-300 (out of 3500 unique students) student survey returns per year, and 20-40 LEG surveys (out of 1000+ LEGs). While this is mostly designed to help improve the program overall and inform planning for future support and professional development, it does provide additional feedback on teachers, too.

## Retain

Nearly 100% of WVS instructors return each year. Since 2000, WVS averages less than one teacher per year leaving. Typically, when teachers do leave, they do so for health reasons, birth of a child, etc. In order to gauge their teachers' interest to continue on another year, staff contact teachers in the spring to see if/how they want to continue. They ask the teachers if they would like to keep the same course load and/or courses or if they would like to change and teach different courses.

WVS teachers have reported that they continue to sign on with WVS because WVS offers them opportunities to earn graduate credit and license-renewal CEUs. WVS sends personal notes and cards to teachers who are reaching a milestone in their career or those who have had a death, birth, or other life event in their family. The staff offers a social event (typically in the form of a dinner) for the teachers when they get together for the professional development. WVS also provides opportunities for promotion by asking teachers who have been employed with them for an extended amount of time to take on additional roles, including but not limited to helping with curriculum decisions, assisting with the alignment of curriculum to standards, mentoring new teachers, and creating and/or planning for professional development opportunities.

# Appendix WI-1

## Wisconsin Virtual School

### Performance Expectations for Teachers Checklist

The success of the Wisconsin Virtual School is directly related to the success of the students. The success of our students depends in large measure on the effectiveness of our teaching, the quality of our content, the learning environment we establish and the way the WVS teachers and the WVS administration function as a team.

The following performance objectives are established for Wisconsin Virtual School teachers. They are the basis of the performance evaluation for WVS teachers. The purpose of the performance evaluation is to improve the effectiveness of the program by providing constructive feedback and support based on the needs of individual teachers and the WVS faculty as a whole.

*Being a WVS Teacher Means the Teacher Must:*

- Hold a teaching license in the subject area and grade level of the online course (s)
- Demonstrate a positive attitude towards online teaching and enthusiasm about being a member of the WVS team
- Comply with Wisconsin Virtual School/CESA #9 Education Acceptable Use Policy and Copyright Policy (GBD)
- Comply with and enforce Wisconsin Virtual School's Student Academic Integrity Policy
- Comply with Wisconsin laws and policies governing the privacy of student data and confidentiality
- Access the WVS online campus and their email accounts regularly for announcements and discussions
- Participate in WVS professional development activities and meetings
- Understand and abide by the terms of their consultant contracts
- Submit invoices in a timely manner in the correct format
- Meet professional obligations on time

### Managing the Online Class

*Preparing*

- Ensure that your course version is accurate and complete and that you have all necessary teaching materials ([Collaborate Room information](#), [Plagiarism Tool access](#), [course subscription access](#) etc.), contact WVS for assistance when needed
- Update the grade center, syllabus and course content as needed.
- Add introductory and welcome announcements
- Add a welcome folder that includes: instructor contact information, webliography, course policies, Collaborate office hours ( 1 hour minimum per week), tech support information, helpful hints, tips for successful completion etc.
- Update instructor contact information in the SIS
- Prepare a welcome letter for students that includes at minimum a reminder of course start date, required instructional materials (if applicable), and teacher contact information
- Prepare a welcome letter to send to Local Education Guide (LEG) to introduce yourself, provide contact information and open the communication lines.

### Getting Students Started and Engaged

- Send welcome letters to students as they enroll in the course
- By the end of the first week after a student's start date, verify that the student has begun work
- Verify student, family and school contact (LEG) information for each student

- Send welcome letters to the Local Education Guide (LEG)
- Gather/review information about student schedule, background, etc. that will help you support and encourage the student
- Schedule and post information, announcements, send emails on Blackboard Collaborate synchronous opportunities (required 1 hour minimum per week)
- Ensure that students can use the course tools and have completed the course orientation
- Review the Help resources available and how students use them
- Communicate high expectations for performance and behavior
- Take appropriate action for any student not engaged or ready to learn

### Daily

- Log into your WVS campus
- Respond to student, parent and school inquiries within 24-48 hours
- Acknowledge submission of work within 24-48 hours or as agreed between the WVS teacher and the student
- Post grades in a timely (within 72 hours) and consistent manner
  - This includes reading and responding to new discussion board postings
  - Provide authentic and direct feedback
  - Clear assignments and allow additional attempts as needed
- Check email at least once every 24 hours or as agreed between the WVS teacher and the student
- Monitor your enrollments for new students, changes and end dates
  - contact new students and LEGS to introduce yourself and provide any additional information related to course requirements and expectations
  - Submit final grade reports to WVS for those students whose end date has arrived
- Be available to schedule email, telephone, instant messaging, or web conferences with WVS students, school level facilitator or LEG, parents or others as needed
- Maintain student work, instructor feedback and class communications inside the course to the extent possible
- Manage instruction with the goal that each student will complete the class on time

### Weekly

- Post your online and virtual office hours, communicate with students when you will be available, or if there will be an absence or scheduled time off
  - A minimum of one Virtual office hour per week via [Collaborate](#) is required
- Post, update, remove announcements weekly to keep students informed of important information
  - Post new announcement relevant to the course
  - Post announcements that provide students with resources
  - Post announcements pertaining to interesting information regarding course topics
  - Update announcements with changes in office hours or Collaborate Virtual sessions
  - Remove outdated announcements
  - Keep a welcome announcement posted at all times that provides directions for finding contact information, office hours, tech support, course navigation, etc.
- Be sure to make some sort of weekly contact with all students. This can vary each week and could include: emails, announcements, feedback on assignments, discussion board posts, connections during Collaborate sessions or even phone calls.
- Refer students to the course schedule to make adjustments in their course pace
- Generate Weekly Progress Report

### **Wrapping Up the Course**

- Notify WVS if there appears to be a problem with a student completing on time
  - We suggest you email end date notices to remind students and LEGS of upcoming end dates. There is no need to mention extensions.
- Ensure that grade book is complete and accurate when class closes
- Send the final grade report to WVS support staff (no later than the date required by the school or within 7 days after course end date)
- Save email communications with students for at least 30 days after the grade has been submitted

### **Instruction and the Learning Environment**

- Improve learning by planned instruction
- Diagnose learning needs with assistance from the local school
- Prescribe content delivery by presenting concepts effectively, using real-world applications and activities that promote inquiry-based learning
- Vary instructional strategies to meet the needs of individual learners
- Provide students with opportunities to work to the limits of their interests and abilities
- Use group work to promote student interaction and to foster collaborative skills when possible
- Create a feeling of community and mutual respect
- Communicate clearly and in a positive manner high expectations for performance, participation and behavior
- Demonstrate proficiency in the selection and use of online course tools
- Demonstrate the appropriate use of technology to present curriculum
- Provide students with assignments and assessments that develop information literacy and technology skills
- Provide additional assistance to students who are struggling

### **Student Progress and Assessment**

- Monitor and evaluate the effects of your student instruction
- Assess learning by maintaining an accurate and up to date grade book inside the online course
- Grade all submitted work within 72 hours with exceptions for students submitting more than one assignment in a 24 hour period
- Take actions to keep every student active and engaged, communicating with family, school and WVS as necessary to prevent failures and incompletes
- Inform WVS when a student has been inactive without reasonable explanation for more than seven days
- Advise Local Education Guide about progress and outcomes of individual students, include administrators, parents, and guardians as requested
- Submit final grade reports no later than the date required by the school or within 7 days after course end date

### **Program Development and Professional Growth**

- Provide constructive feedback and recommendations to WVS on course enhancements, instructional practice and policies, program administration and faculty support and development
- Participate in content and technology evaluations
- Establish professional growth objectives for becoming a more effective online teacher
- Participate in professional development opportunities when available throughout the year
- Develop a professional portfolio to include trainings attended, evaluations, feedback from students and Local Education Guides

## Discussion

As can be seen from each program's case study, K-12 virtual schools conduct similar and unique teacher infrastructure practices. This section provides a synthesis of each process – *Recruit & Hire, Train & Support, Evaluate, and Retain* – and highlights where programs align and where they differ.

### Recruit & Hire

Within the processes of recruiting and hiring, there are common threads throughout the programs. Georgia Virtual School (GaVS), Idaho Digital Learning Academy (IDLA), Illinois Virtual School (IVS), *Michigan Virtual School* (MVS), Montana Digital Academy (MTDA), and Wisconsin Virtual School (WVS) recruit primarily by advertising positions on their websites and professional organization listservs, via conferences, and through word of mouth with their current staff.

Out of all of the programs, a clear distinction exists for The Virtual High School (VHS) and Wisconsin eSchool Network (WEN), which are consortia. For VHS, the vast majority of the teachers join the instructional staff via the Collaborative/Consortium process, where the teacher's school becomes a member of VHS and then the teacher has an opportunity to teach an online course. VHS lets their partner schools know what qualities they are looking for in their instructional staff. As the partner schools are choosing staff to teach for VHS, they have those qualities in mind: flexibility, strong written communication skills, strong interpersonal skills, and an affinity for—and facility with—technology. VHS reviews teacher applications and uses the highly-qualified teacher standards to do so.

Unlike the other schools, WEN, the second of the two consortia involved in this study, does not hire/employ teachers. Instead, they depend on the partner districts to refer and share staff to teach for their consortia. As is mentioned in their full case, they have two types of instructional models. The first is local, which equates to a local teacher being assigned to instruct an online course with local students. The second is network, which is defined as a local teacher instructing an online course where the students taking the online course are enrolled outside the local district. Roughly 90% of enrollments are at the local level, while 10% are at the network level. Network sections are often called shared or statewide sections since the course/teacher is shared across partners throughout the state of Wisconsin. Varying models of instructional employment exist within districts. For example, there are teachers who teach face-to-face in traditional schools and who teach online for WEN; there are teachers who are consultants for their school districts and work for WEN as part of that consultancy; and there are some that are hired by a district to teach part-time in their supplemental program offered through WEN. Clearly these programs have different ways of hiring and managing their instructional staff. No matter the model, WEN is not involved in hiring or recruiting the instructors within their consortia.

While hiring suggestions are gathered by the Supervisor and Assistant Supervisor of Instruction and a department chair, a unique aspect for GaVS is that the final hiring decisions are made by the Georgia State Board of Education. For the other programs who hire teachers, typically the presidents or heads of the organization make the final decision and are primary decision makers when hiring new teachers.



VHS, GaVS, and IVS require their prospective teachers to take a training course prior to applying for their program. The VHS course is a graduate-level online course called *Online Teaching Methodologies* (OTM), and the GaVS training is called TOOL (Teaching Online Open Learning), GaVS's open online model that centers on effective online teaching. IVS has a course called Teaching Online 101.

IDLA and MTDA look for candidates who have online and/or blended classroom experience as well as experience with learning management systems (LMS) or other course management tools. Additionally, these two programs in particular find it important for their candidates to have a philosophical belief in online learning and the meaningful use of technology in education.

Some of the schools host pre-interviews in a web-based space, and then have face-to-face interviews with instructional candidates. GaVS, MTDA, IVS, and IDLA do not conduct face-to-face interview; instead, they rely on a web-based interview that allows those making hiring decisions to see how the candidate handles communicating through the digital medium. GaVS looks for candidates who have taught online before. WVS invites candidates to a face-to-face teacher training to see how well the candidates collaborate with others and how tech savvy they are.

## Train & Support

Initial training across the programs involves getting new teachers equipped with knowledge about the LMS. For GaVS, that LMS is Desire2Learn (D2L), and their teachers have an online orientation to D2L at the start of their employment. IVS initial training includes a course in using D2L tools with applications to practice skills and web meetings to learn the program's student information system. IDLA requires their new teachers to complete five credits worth of content, including IDLA's New Teacher Orientation (1 credit asynchronous), Summer Conference (1 credit face-to-face), and Teaching Online for IDLA (3 credits asynchronous). MTDA's training includes 10-20 hours of digital tool training with primary focus on the student information system (SIS), LMS, plagiarism tool, Camtasia, and SnagIt. At WVS, once hired, teachers take part in a face-to-face training. In total, there are two days of face-to-face training and two days of online synchronous training. MVS's new teachers have a one-on-one meeting with the Instructional Manager to talk about the systems the teacher will be using; they also receive a pre-flight checklist to document their course is ready. MVS's new hires also complete Online Instructor Training (OIT), an online course divided into four modules, including how to communicate, online pedagogy, best practices, etc. VHS mandates successful completion of the OTM course for all teachers from member schools and any other teachers interested in joining the program as contract teachers who will potentially be used to teach courses with high enrollment. OTM, a graduate level, three-credit course, provides pedagogical training for a collaborative online classroom, introduces teachers to the LMS (D2L), and gives teachers the opportunity to review the course they will teach for VHS. Each OTM participant is assigned a facilitator who provides feedback, guidance, and support. Teachers are given a sandbox course to practice technical skills and familiarize themselves with the course they will be teaching. In 2008, Wisconsin required all teachers who plan to teach online to have 30 hours of professional development in online learning. This spawned the creation of a three-credit

course WEN offers to partners called “Taming the World of Online Learning.” Last year, Wisconsin legislation repealed the 2008 requirement because the government expects the districts to have appropriate professional development for their teachers. WEN still requires all of their instructors to take the three-credit course before they teach online.

Mentoring occurs differently across programs. For GaVS, new teacher hires are paired with mentor teachers in their content area for one to two semesters. Similarly, at WVS, a mentor is provided to each new teacher for the first year and is usually from the same content area. MVS has no formal mentoring program, although the Lead Instructor for the new MVS teacher serves as a mentor. New hires are also paired with an experienced instructor who teaches the same course they are assigned. IDLA has mentor teachers in each content area that act as points of contact not only for new instructors, but also for those who are struggling. IVS has a single mentor teacher with over a decade of experience who works with each of the new hires throughout their first year. At MTDA, new instructors are mentored by full-time staff as needed. Additionally, four staff have been hired at MTDA to be adult learning mentors who help with the LMS and a Facebook-like informal community building tool that is more organic and provides just-in-time support. MTDA staff approaches mentoring as more of a community-based structure than a top-down institutional approach. At VHS, a structured mentoring program couples each new teacher with a faculty advisor who monitors and evaluates instructional practice each week in the first semester of teaching. The Supervisor of Instruction ensures consistent messaging is provided to all new teachers by sending faculty advisors weekly email templates to be modified and sent to new teachers. Veteran teachers are mentored by VHS Curriculum Coordinators within the teacher’s subject area. Teachers and Curriculum Coordinators communicate as needed based on questions that arise in classes. Since WEN does not hire their teachers, they do not provide a mentoring program.

Professional development opportunities also differ across programs. In addition to New Teacher Training, IDLA has Level 2 and Level 3 training. Level 2 includes more attention to basic technology, best practices, and pedagogy; and Level 3 includes differentiated topics targeted to teacher professional growth goals (master teacher, course developer, blended learning, etc). IDLA requires their teachers to take a PD course every 15 months, credit which counts toward recertification. WVS’s Professional Learning Communities (PLC) meets four times a year and offer at least one professional development opportunity per month. Additionally, WVS, MVS, IVS, MTDA, and GaVS take part in a summer series with the VSLA, which entails five to six hours of training each of the three months of the summer.

MVS hosts an annual event known as “Collaboration of the Minds” where many instructors come together for a two-day, face-to-face professional development opportunity. They also have a one-day training that takes place during MACUL, the annual Michigan-wide school technology conference. They structure their training using an activity called Ed Camp. Ed Camps leave the traditional stand-and-deliver, one-shot sessions behind and make way for highly interactive, organic spaces for instructors to get together and share ideas about current, relevant issues. The Ed Camp commences with a white board activity where instructors can add sticky notes that identify current issues they are experiencing. The event coordinators then group like-minded issues together and organize teachers based on those groupings, asking one of the teachers to facilitate discussion. Ed Camp is a personalized, just-in-time professional development experience.

At GaVS, training is created and performed by the Teacher Quality Specialist. There are monthly online PD sessions that are not required, but attendance is calculated as part of the evaluation process. Each year, GaVS hosts two biannual symposia to bring teachers together face-to-face for intense training. IVS conducts quarterly professional development evening webinars, hosts a three-day, face-to-face summer professional development, and often hosts a one-day winter professional development. IVS also has a technical working group who delivers information about new system upgrades at the beginning of each semester. Every fall, MTDA offers a self-paced digital course that goes over the handbook, teacher expectations, and anything that is new. Beyond new teacher training, MTDA offers three additional professional development opportunities: the Online Learning Institute, a one-day workshop tied to the state teacher convention; a training at the start of school; and, as mentioned above, the summer training that occurs via webinars provided by the VSLA. MTDA trainings are mandatory for all instructors.

Training for VHS instructors beyond new teacher training is more informal and includes staff members' open office hours, department meetings, and email groups where small groups of teachers communicate with curriculum staff (and each other) on issues relating to course development or online learning. Formal training is done on an as needed basis. WEN has a train-the-trainer model of teacher training within each of their partner districts. They also provide on-demand operations and system training as needed and offer an annual PD day where all of the instructional staff and partners come together to learn face-to-face.

As mentioned above, MTDA has a Facebook-like informal community-building tool that is more organic and provides just-in-time support. Similarly, IDLA has Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) in Google+ that are designed as book clubs. At IVS, teachers are registered for a "Teacher Resources Module" that allows them to share resources. WVS has an organic space in Google Communities, allowing the teachers to get together, reflect, ask questions, and learn from one another. WEN runs a PLC through Google Sites that meets four times per year with the different collaborative partners. Some additional differences include WVS teachers being trained to troubleshoot technology issues so the teachers can fix things on their own and MVS creating the Instructor Corner, a shared space for instructors in Blackboard, as a way for teachers to discuss content-specific issues.

## Evaluate

Evaluation practices differ from one program to the next. As a consortium, WEN neither hires nor evaluates instructional staff; evaluation is the partner's responsibility. Similarly, the in-depth teacher evaluation process that occurs in a face-to-face school is not really in the realm of VHS. Typically the onus of conducting a more formal and possibly mandated evaluation process is on the partner school.

However, VHS still evaluates performance of teachers who teach for the program. New teachers are evaluated by the faculty advisor each week. A faculty advisor evaluation form is filed so that the Supervisor of Instruction can monitor overall progress of new teachers. Veteran teachers are formally evaluated on a schedule dictated by past performance and LMS reporting data. For example, VHS runs a daily report to see how often teachers are signing in, as they are expected to sign in every day, Monday through Friday. The report flags teachers so that curriculum staff

can check who does not log into their courses for two consecutive days. LMS data also show whether or not teachers are grading work on a consistent basis and meeting the expectation of returning grades to students within a week of the assignment's due date. If there is a teacher who is underperforming, VHS implements the faculty sanctioning protocol, which includes warning/probationary status and, if needed, a consultation with administration at the member school to replace the underperforming teacher. VHS also collects survey data from students, which is used to identify possible instructional issues.

For GaVS, all teachers are formally evaluated every semester. These evaluations are based on the iNACOL *Standards for Quality Online Teaching* and GA-specific standards. Evaluations, performed at GaVS by the Quality Assurance Specialist, inform how many segments are assigned to a teacher each semester. Included in the evaluations are student end-of-course surveys and pass rates. At IDLA, teachers are evaluated once every three weeks using data points, such as asynchronous instruction, synchronous instruction, announcements, grade center feedback, communication, announcements, intervention, student and parent evaluations, student pass rate, and professional development. IDLA evaluates full-time and part-time teachers differently. Principals perform formal walkthroughs every three weeks, and IDLA's evaluations are used to determine bonus pay and teaching assignments.

IVS evaluations are based on the expectations outlined in their instructional contracts and included but are not limited to the following: logging in at least every other day; showing presence in the classroom; maintaining the grade book; communicating with students and staff; completing initial student contact at the start of each term; reaching out to struggling students; and participating actively. IVS instructors use the Instructor Participation Report and Communication Plan to log their activities. IVS monitors teachers in December, April, and July using three data points: student enrollments, communication plan, and success rate. IVS also monitors how many days teachers log into courses, as well as how involved they are with PD opportunities. Evaluations at IVS are used to provide teachers constructive feedback on their effectiveness and to show them where they need to concentrate to make improvements.

MVS's independently contracted teachers are evaluated three years in a row and then moved to a three-year rotation. All instructors are evaluated informally on a random basis throughout the year. These evaluations include periodic course walkthroughs. Lead Instructors also check in at least twice an academic term to look for teacher presence and quality feedback. Formal evaluations include a mentor survey and students' end-of-course surveys as well as an instructor self-assessment. Instructors are at-will employees. When not meeting expectations, instructors are provided feedback and notice about what can be done to improve. For MTDA, evaluations are done by three members of MTDA staff. There is a 15-minute meeting at the start of the year to discuss teachers' needs, what they feel they need to work on, and what goals they have. Virtual walkthroughs are done two or three times a year using the "Pretty Good Online Teaching Standards," which were developed using the iNACOL standards. The end-of-semester survey from students also provides instructor feedback.

WVS does not have any formal evaluation process as teachers are hired on a consultant contract to perform certain job duties, although informal Teacher Consultant Expectations and informal evaluation input using iNACOL Standards are applied. Despite no formal evaluation process, WVS staff have clear checks and balances to ensure the teachers are working with their students in a manner that matches WVS's expectations. For example, surveys are sent to the Local Education Guides

(LEGS), Coaches, and Mentors working to support students in their online experiences in districts, as well as to the students. These surveys provide feedback to WVS on those teaching their courses.

## Retain

As can be expected of consortia, VHS and WEN are more focused on retaining partner schools in the consortia, so they do not formally track teacher retention. All programs mention losing staff for a variety of reasons, including but not limited to unexpected illnesses, changes in lifestyle, workload shifts, retirement, moving, etc.

GaVS provides opportunities to reward and retain teachers. First is the Master Teacher distinction, in which a teacher has been teaching for GaVS for three years and has accumulated high evaluation marks. This distinction includes pay increases for contract teachers while full-time teachers receive just the award. Prior to Master Teacher status, distinguished teachers at GaVS can be mentor teachers for new hires and/or pre-service teachers. Mentor teachers receive a stipend. Another opportunity for teachers before they are eligible for the Master Teacher distinction is to become a verifier in TOOL. Within TOOL, there are additional recognition and badging opportunities including “Taught 1000 students,” “Taught for five years,” and “Mentor Teacher”. WVS retains nearly 100% of its instructors each year. Since 2000, WVS averages a loss of less than one teacher per year. Opportunities that help retain teachers at WVS include graduate credit and license-renewal CEUs, personal connections for family and milestones, socials, and opportunities for promotion.

IDLA instructors express that the income is a big factor in their signing on as instructors from year to year. Additionally, IDLA feels like a community to the teachers and cultivates a relationship-building space. Teachers also express that they enjoy being involved with 21st century teaching opportunities, PD, collaboration, and networking with their peers. IVS prides themselves on being an approachable administrative staff who are seen as lines of support. Like IDLA, IVS provides a culture of community that fosters teachers helping and supporting each other. There are no formal processes for recognizing teacher performance other than “shout-outs” at the start of the terms. MTDA has a teacher retention rate of 95%. Retention strategies are the staff’s responsive nature to instructors, multiple training options, competitive pay, and course updating by staff rather than teachers. At MVS, competitive pay, PD, flexible work environment, and support systems are what keeps instructional staff returning. Full-time instructors may also apply to go on for masters and doctoral programs via the MVU tuition reimbursement program.

The results of this study provide information about teacher infrastructure practices in K-12 virtual schools in the United States. Knowledge gleaned from these programs will help current programs and those that are starting anew understand various possible approaches. Some interesting implications and questions arose out of the findings and are explicated in the next section.

## Implications and Future Research

Some of the programs, including GaVS, IVS, and VHS, require their teacher candidates to complete training in online teaching prior to applying. Is this a practice that all virtual schools could benefit from? Additionally, WVS invites their teacher candidates for face-to-face training and to meet other instructional staff. IVS also offers a face-to-face, two and a half day training each summer. Is this something that should be considered as a standard?

Regarding continuing education training, is it important for virtual schools to continue to offer professional development to their staff? Moreover, should this professional development be mandatory?

In terms of evaluations, should evaluations be tied to promotion or merit pay? Or should they merely be a self-reflective practice for teachers? Should they include peer review teaching?

Should there be more formal mentoring processes? Which mentoring processes are most beneficial for which programs? Should there be a single mentor or a group of mentors for each teacher? Also, is there a certain amount of time when mentoring should occur, such as just for the first year, for the first three years? Or should mentoring be incorporated throughout all teachers' careers, even for veteran teachers?

An area that is gaining importance across the field is the necessity of on-site mentors/facilitators for students. Should teacher training at the virtual school include ways to coordinate/work with on-site mentors/facilitators? This came up in many of the interviews/focus groups; some of the programs express a need to figure out a different model, especially if their online teachers are also face-to-face teachers during the day, which tends to be when students are accessing their courses and need the most help. IDLA mentioned that they switched their model a bit to accommodate this need by hiring full-time teachers with daytime availability. IDLA is also building a tutoring tool that could potentially make a pool of tutors available to students during the day if/when their teachers are unavailable.

Another theme across the programs is the use of organic PLCs. A study examining how these communities are set up and cultivated would be useful and could look at how the space is being used, how it is cultivated, who is doing the cultivating, what motivates teachers to use the space, whether it's useful for it to be mandatory to participate, etc.

Another area that would be really intriguing to study closely is the curriculum of professional development opportunities within each program. What curriculum is used? Who designs the curriculum? What is required/mandatory training? What standards are used to develop the training? Is training aligned to university credit and/or CEUs for renewal of licensure?

More and more, programs are not looking at the tech-savvy nature of candidates. Instead, they are looking at their online pedagogical knowledge. Is this shift happening for all programs?

Is there a benefit for consortia to be a model worth considering across the field? Is this a good way to leverage instructional staff? Within consortia structures, should training be offered at the consortia level, school level, or elsewhere?

According to several of the virtual schools, many of the new teacher applicant hires are coming directly from their teacher education program. Given that only 1.3% of teacher education programs

across the U.S. are preparing their pre-service teachers for K-12 online learning, and given the constant surge of students taking online courses, will those virtual schools that are not currently hiring first-year teachers have to start considering them?

While this study presents an abundance of descriptive details about teachers in K-12 virtual schools, it also resulted in a great number of questions to ponder for future studies. The field should continue to learn from what can be gleaned from studies done within traditional settings. What we have learned from this experience prompts the call for more exploratory studies looking at a variety of models and processes within K-12 virtual school settings.



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