

We're sure you have Questions

BEFORE WE ENROLL

Why do students attend the Philadelphia Virtual Academy (PVA)?

Students may attend PVA for a variety of reasons. Students pursuing other interests (for example athletics, dance, music) may travel frequently or may need a flexible, non-traditional schedule. Some students attend for medical or social issues; other students may want to accelerate their education.

Who can attend PVA?

Students who: have completed 5th grade by the start of the school year; are in grades 6-12; and/or who turn 21 during the school year may attend PVA.

What does it cost to attend PVA?

There is no tuition to attend the Philadelphia Virtual Academy as long as the student is a resident of the School District of Philadelphia. As with any public school, students are expected to purchase their own school supplies for projects and assignments.

How do I enroll my child?

To enroll a student in PVA, please go to the SDP website at <http://www.philasd.org/PVA> and/or contact us at PVA@philasd.org or call 215-400-3110.

Do I need the approval of my school district to enroll my child?

Yes, PVA is a program of the School District of Philadelphia and the district must approve your enrollment.

Is PVA year-round?

No, we follow a traditional school calendar. However, since there are no snow days in a virtual academy, the last day of school does not vary from the schedule set at the start of the school year. The first day of school is September 3, 2013.

When can I enroll my child in PVA?

You can enroll today for classes starting in September 2013! Enrollment periods correspond to start dates, which are typically at the beginning (Aug.-Sept.) and mid-year (Jan.) of the school year. However, students may enroll any time of the school year.

What does my child need in order to succeed at PVA?

The single most important attribute for student success is **motivation**. If a student wants to succeed in school, with the help of our staff they will. Students also need other skills, such as organization, communication, literacy and computer skills - all of which can be learned by a motivated student. Involved and supportive parents are also critical to student success.

Is there somewhere I can go to get more information/help?

PVA is establishing drop-in learning centers throughout the city so that families and students can get information about the virtual academy, assistance with enrollment, or guidance with online courses during the school year. The learning centers feature teaching assistants and special education staff to meet your needs. The first center is located at the School District of Philadelphia's Education Center, at 440 N. Broad Street; additional locations will be announced.

COURSES AND CREDITS

What curriculum does PVA use?

Much of the PVA core curriculum was developed by our Pennsylvania certified teachers based upon the Pennsylvania state standards. In order to provide students with a diverse selection of course offerings, PVA may also use other

course vendors who have been vetted for quality. This allows teachers to individualize the curriculum for students' varying abilities and learning styles. Classes are available in a variety of ability levels, including anchors/foundation, college prep, and honors. AP courses are offered through selected providers.

FAQ

Does my child have to take all of their courses at the same level?

No; your child may test into the Anchors level of one course, and the Honors level of another. That is just fine at PVA and we will enroll them in each course that suits their needs, whether remedial or advanced.

1

Anchors/ Foundation level

courses are a foundational version of the original course content for easier reading and comprehension of concepts

2

College Preparatory level

courses are the traditional, original courses that are designed on grade level

3

Honors level

courses offer enrichment activities and an honors distinction on a student's transcript

4

Advanced Placement (AP) level

courses offer a chance to earn college credit at the end of a course by testing well on the AP exam for the subject.

How are students placed in PVA?

Students are placed into classes based upon their previous academic records and PVA course placement tests. Accurate course placement is essential to online student success. PVA placement exams ensure that your student is registered for online courses that match their level of readiness. PVA exams are available in the core subjects of language arts, math, science, and history; there is also an English grammar skills and math skills diagnostic test. Only the English grammar skills and math diagnostic exams are required before enrolling in classes; subject specific tests may be required if students are not at grade level in reading and/or math or if their academic records indicate gaps in learning in specific subject areas. Students are monitored to ensure they are in appropriate classes.

How are students prepared for success?

All students are required to attend and complete an orientation class the last week of August. This class walks students through how to use the computer, work in their classes, participate in live sessions, contact their teachers, and communicate effectively online. This ensures all students have the tools and knowledge they need to succeed. This year, orientation is scheduled for August 19-21, 2013.

Will my child's credits transfer to PVA?

Yes, credits your child has earned in any public, private or parochial school, including home school will transfer to PVA, provided they fall into the Pennsylvania Department of Education's guidelines.

How does course scheduling work for high school students at PVA?

Students at PVA are scheduled according to the SDP's graduation requirements. A typical high school course load is six credits per year. Guidance reviews transcripts from your student's previous school(s) to determine what courses he or she needs to take in order to graduate. Courses are scheduled according to standard course progressions, unless alternate scheduling is necessary.

When students enroll at PVA at any time other than the start of the year, every effort is made to match the courses they were taking at their prior school and to begin where they left off. If a student was failing a course at his/her prior school, he/she is required to repeat the entire course and start at the beginning of the course, regardless of when he/she starts classes at PVA.

How does course scheduling work for middle school students at PVA?

Middle school students are scheduled according to the courses appropriate to their prior year's courses and current grade level. The primary exception is that students are scheduled for the next most appropriate math course, regardless of grade level. All middle school core subject courses are yearlong courses, while health, physical education, art and music one semester courses. If appropriate, middle school students may be permitted to take a world language course.



How will you prepare me to be a successful online learner?

What are PVA graduation requirements?

The PVA graduation requirements are the same as the School District's.

TEACHERS AND STAFF

Who teaches PVA classes?

All PVA classes are taught by highly-qualified teachers contracted by the Brandywine Virtual Academy. All BVA teachers are Pennsylvania certified in their subject area. The majority of teachers are full-time, and work from our office in Chester County. They work together closely, allowing them to collaborate and share their ideas and successes. Each core subject area has a special education certified teacher, who works with teachers to individualize curriculum to meet specific student needs. Teachers are available Monday-Thursday from 8:00AM to 8:00PM, and Fridays from 8:00AM to 4:00PM, by email and phone or in their virtual offices.

How do students get help from their teachers?

Students have a variety of ways to communicate with their teachers. The most popular way is in a virtual office, but students and teachers also communicate by phone or email. Students choose the method with which they are the most comfortable.

Does PVA have guidance counselors?

Yes; PVA guidance counselors assist with scheduling, preparing students for college, supporting special education needs, and helping students with personal issues.

What is a teaching assistant?

Teaching assistants help teachers contact students, foster communication, and along with teachers help ensure student success. Teaching assistants reach out to students regarding academic progress and attendance. They help students with organization and study skills. They can also help with basic technical issues.

SPECIAL SERVICES

What if my child needs special education services?

A meeting will be convened for all interested students with an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) to ensure that the goals in the IEP can be met in PVA. If the IEP team concurs that the placement is appropriate, a Notice of Recommended Placement (NOREP) will be issued and signed by the parent. Special education certified teachers will serve as case managers, providing direct academic support for students in addition to guidance for the content teachers to ensure that they are modifying assignments as required by the IEP.

What if my child is an English Language Learner?

The large amounts of reading and writing required in online courses may present challenges for English Language Learners (ELLs). In general, it is recommended that all students enrolled in online learning programs demonstrate the following: strong literacy skills (in their first language), organizational skills, motivational skills, self-advocacy skills, computer literacy skills, and problem-solving skills. Each student would need to be evaluated to determine a planned program of English as a Second Language instruction (ESL) to facilitate the acquisition of English language skills and provide an instructional program appropriate to the student's developmental and instructional level. Online learning programs can be utilized to provide individualization of curriculum and instruction for English Language Learners who score an overall composite score of 3.5 or higher with a minimum literacy composite score of 3.5 on WIDA ACCESS test or W-APT. Full-time only online programs are not recommended for ELLs who score lower than 3.5 on the WIDA Access Test or W-APT.

HOW DOES IT WORK?

How does PVA work?

Students login to their classes, submit their work, and contact their teachers, all through the Internet using a school-issued computer. Students can attend school from any location with an Internet or phone connection.

What is a "mastery" environment?

A mastery environment is one in which students are expected to understand a lesson before they move onto the next lesson. In a typical school, students move on to the next lesson whether or they have mastered the material. Our goal is for every child to achieve mastery, defined as earning an 80% or better in a class. If a student has not demonstrated mastery of a concept, they are encouraged to study the material further, work with their teacher, and

retake a (similar) quiz, or rewrite their paper.

What does *asynchronous* mean?

Asynchronous means that students may complete their studies on a schedule that fits their needs. Classes are available 24/7, and students may submit their any work anytime during the week. Teachers are available weekdays and weeknights to work with students and parents.

Are there live classes?

Yes. PVA classes meet as a group once a week in a “virtual classroom,” which also serves as a teacher’s “virtual office.” Interacting by voice and text, users can participate in group discussions, work out math problems, receive direct instruction, and share artwork and music. Group sessions are recorded, so students can review previous lessons as needed.

Do PVA classes use a traditional textbook?

Yes, for now, most PVA classes use a textbook; typical publishers are Prentice-Hall and Holt. However, we do have more courses using online textbooks and the number grows every year.

Can my child work at his or her own pace?

Yes, the flexibility of online learning allows students to work at their own pace. However, students are expected to keep up with their assignments and to work at a pace that will allow them to complete the course on time. All assignments are available from the first day of class, and students are encouraged to work ahead if they understand the material and have mastered the concept.

How much time will my child spend doing school work?

By Pennsylvania law, students are required to spend 900 to 990 hours per academic year on their schoolwork. The actual amount of time to be successful online and to complete courses may vary due to a student’s abilities in a particular subject. Students are not limited in the amount of time they can spend on an assignment.

Pennsylvania School Code Attendance Requirements:			
GRADE 6	450 hours per semester	... which means 25 hours per week	THAT'S 5 hours per weekday
	900 hours per academic year		
GRADE 7 to 12	495 hours per semester	... which means 27.5 hours per week	THAT'S 5.5 hours per weekday
	990 hours per academic year		
BOTTOM LINE: Spend 1 hour per day, per course to stay on track.			

How is physical education (P.E.) taught online?

Classes are a combination of physical activities and academic work. They help students learn and develop healthy life-long habits, and together they develop a fitness program that meets each student’s needs. We provide fitness equipment such as jump ropes, pedometers, and exercise balls, and students submit weekly logs of their activity.

Can my child get P.E. credit for activities such as gymnastics, dance or organized sports?

In most cases, the portion of direct instruction that is taught by a certified instructor can be applied toward course requirements. This must be pre-approved by the guidance department, and the instructor must complete weekly logs that must be submitted to the P.E. teacher. Any fees for private classes are the responsibility of the parent/guardian. Practice time does not count towards P.E. activity hours.

How are science labs completed online?

Students enrolled in science courses complete their lab work in a virtual laboratory. In addition, students may be required to complete lab assignments in their home using common household products and utensils, such as baking powder and measuring spoons. In some instances, students may be required to purchase supplies to complete their science labs.

Does a teacher grade my child's work, or the computer?

One benefit of our virtual academy is that teachers spend all of their time working with students, and providing students with meaningful feedback on assignments. Of course, some things are graded by the computer, such as true/false or matching questions, but all of a student's writing is graded by his/her teacher.

MY ROLE AS A PARENT/GUARDIAN

What responsibilities do parents have?

First, be sure an online school is one in which your child will succeed. Make sure your child has an appropriate study area and proper home supervision. Second, take an interest in your child's work, and let them know how important education is. Unmotivated students rarely succeed in a virtual program. Third, keep informed on your child's progress. Talk to your child's teachers; let them know the best way to contact you. The more communication between teachers, students and parents, the more successful our students are.

Does PVA send home report cards?

Quarterly report cards are issued by the School District of Philadelphia.

How will I know if my child is not progressing in his/her classes?

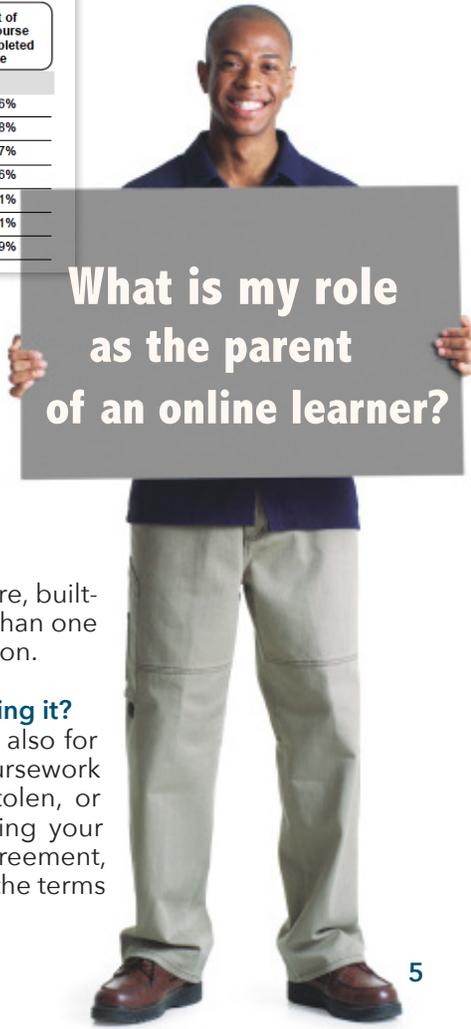
If your child is not progressing as expected, the teacher will contact you to discuss it. You'll also see any lack of progress on your child's progress report.

Can I view my child's progress and activity in classes?

Student grades are available to parents anytime. Parents can see which assignments have been completed, when they were submitted, assignment grades, and teacher feedback. Parents can also see a complete log of their child's activities in a class. Progress reports are emailed to parents, the District, and students every Friday to keep parents informed of their child's progress.

PHILADELPHIA SCHOOL DISTRICT				2012	12:22 PM			
Student	Subject	Days Enrolled	Possible Credit	Assignment Points Earned to Date	Assignments Grade Average	Cumulative Weekly Points	Percent of weekly assignments completed to date	Percent of overall course work completed to date
Student's Name Here				Last Login 17.95 hours			as of 12/13/2011 12:22 PM	
Algebra II Honors	21CCCS	99	1.00	473 out of 710	67%	765	93%	36%
Biology A	BWA	97	1.00	N/A	79.53%	1500	69%	48%
Careers 101	21CCCS	99	0.50	737 out of 865	85%	390	222%	87%
English Literature Honors	21CCCS	99	1.00	369 out of 510	72%	765	67%	26%
Health	21CCCS	99	1.00	743 out of 825	90%	765	108%	41%
Intro to Fitness	21CCCS	99	0.50	380 out of 510	75%	390	131%	51%
World Geography	21CCCS	99	1.00	259 out of 375	69%	765	49%	19%

A weekly progress report like the one shown above is sent to all students, their parents, and the school district to closely monitor progress and assignment grades.



What is my role as the parent of an online learner?

TECHNOLOGY

What kind of computer equipment is provided?

Students are issued Apple laptops, which are equipped with all necessary software, built-in microphone and CD/DVD drive. In homes with high speed Internet and more than one child attending our school, we can provide a router to share the Internet connection.

What happens if the school-issued computer gets damaged while my child is using it?

Parents are responsible for damage to all materials issued to their children, and also for returning materials within five (5) days after a student has completed his/her coursework or withdrawn from the Virtual Academy. The insurance deductible for lost, stolen, or accidentally damaged computers is \$100; there are additional details regarding your family's responsibility for the computer in the Virtual Academy's Technology Agreement, which you will receive with your laptop. By powering on the laptop, you agree to the terms in the Technology Agreement; please read it closely before using the computer.

Does PVA provide Internet access and what type of access is needed?

We recommend high speed Internet (cable, FiOS, DSL, satellite) where available. Families can subscribe to Internet service and PVA will reimburse (up to \$40 per month) the cost of the service during the school year. We can also provide a wireless card if Internet access is not available at a child's primary school work location.

Must my child use the school-issued computer?

We strongly recommend students use the school-issued computer, since it has all the software they need, and is configured specifically for their course work. Tech Support will only help resolve issues with school-issued computers.

Does PVA provide technical support?

Yes, PVA has a technical support team whose job is to ensure that technical issues do not prevent students from completing their work. The team is available five days a week from 7:00 AM to 5:00 PM. Remote control software is used to diagnose and fix problems. Also, the team maintains a support website with answers to common issues, which enables students to resolve many difficulties immediately. In addition, technical support keeps a supply of computers ready to ship. If a student has a problem that Tech Support cannot fix quickly, a replacement computer will be sent to the student overnight.

Do PVA computers have censoring or blocking software?

Yes, school computers have software that prevents the computer from visiting most inappropriate websites. The software also tracks sites the computer has visited. Parents must remember that blocking software is not perfect, and that parents should establish expectations with their children regarding appropriate websites to visit. Parents are expected to monitor their student's online activity.

STUDENT LIFE

Are there clubs and is there a graduation ceremony?

Students may participate in extracurricular and activities sponsored by the School District of Philadelphia. Students are able to participate in commencement ceremonies.

Can students participate in extracurricular activities and sports programs?

Yes! PVA students are encouraged to participate in activities that take place outside of the normal school day. PVA sponsors quarterly field trips.

Do we ever have to come to the school building?

Parents and students are encouraged to participate in all that the School District of Philadelphia has to offer, including events at our schools. We want you to know that our doors are always open to you and your student. We let you choose your family's level of involvement. However, there are times when we will require you and/or your student to come to our offices, such as: orientation, IEP meetings, parent-teacher conferences. In addition, all Pennsylvania State required assessments must be taken in a proctored setting. Drop-in learning centers are available to students for support and to interact with their peers.

More questions? Visit us online at www.philasd.org/PVA, email PVA@philasd.org, or call 215-400-3110 to ask any additional questions you have.