

# VHS Learning Student Handbook

2020-2021 School Year



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## Welcome to VHS Learning

We're happy that you've chosen to add VHS Learning to your academic experience! We believe all students should have access to education that meets their needs and interests. Just like each of you is unique, each of our courses is unique. At VHS Learning, there is no one-size-fits-all model. We work closely with each school, student, and teacher, to provide a personal and custom educational experience.

In your class, you'll find students from across the United States and around the world. We believe having a diverse group of students in each class makes for more interesting and meaningful discussions. After all, we live in a global society, and you'll be attending college or working with all different types of people. Preparation for your future starts now! We encourage you to explore our course options and find the ones that are most meaningful to you. Remember - we're here to help you at any time, should you need assistance.

For more than twenty years, we have been deeply committed to making a positive difference in the lives of students and families. We set high academic expectations and provide supportive systems to help ensure all our students reach their fullest potential. We want to prepare you for college, careers, and life – and we're happy that you've taken this first step with us.

Welcome!

Sincerely,  
Carol DeFuria  
President & CEO  
VHS, Inc.

Here is a picture of some of our staff at our 20<sup>th</sup> birthday party in 2017!



## Overview, Mission, and Beliefs

### Overview

We are a non-profit organization providing online courses to participating schools and students across the country and around the world. We offer courses for students at all levels, including advanced placement, honors, and credit recovery. Courses can be customized at a school's request. We also offer a fee-based summer program for student enrichment or credit recovery. It is each school's responsibility to understand any local requirements for participation in online courses within their state/local district.

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

### Mission and Beliefs

Our **mission** is to provide students and teachers with collaborative and engaging learning opportunities.

Our **vision** is to prepare students to be successful in college, careers, and life.

#### OUR BELIEFS:

- **We believe** all students deserve **equal access** to quality educational choices that help them reach their fullest potential.
- **We believe** students learn best within a **supportive, teacher-led, small-group** environment.
- **We believe** educational opportunity need **not be limited by barriers of time and place or** availability of **qualified faculty**.
- **We believe** virtual education should **strengthen, not supplant**, face-to-face education.

## Strategies for Success

### What's Unique about Us

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

### Pace Yourself

Former students shared the most important lesson they learned from taking an online class. Almost every student gave the same advice: **Don't save all your work till the last day of the week!** Often what might look like a quick assignment takes a bit of time. If you leave assignments until the last day of the week, you will likely not have time to pass in high quality work. **Help yourself by planning ahead and setting goals for due dates throughout the week.**

### Attend Class Regularly

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

### Plan Ahead

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

### Get to Know Your Site Coordinator

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

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

- **Check the News area for messages from your teacher**, such as reminders or important updates.
- If it is the first visit of the week, **review the Weekly Overview** to check the table of assignments and activities for the week. Print the table to create a plan and track your work.
- As you begin the week's activities **pay close attention to due dates.** Although most activities are due at the end of the week, some (in particular, discussions) have mid-week due dates.
- **Check your Private Topic daily** to see if you have messages from your teacher!
- **Focus on your goals of the day:** participate in class discussions, complete a written assignment, check in with a group. Your work will vary each week, so tackle assignments consistently and be sure to read and post to discussions at least a few times during the week!

## Getting Help

### Self-advocacy

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

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

### Tips for Requesting Help

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

- Don't be shy! Other students probably have the same question as you.
- Make your questions specific – providing detail helps your teacher solve your problem or provide information that will help you understand the concept more fully.
- Ask questions in the right area – read below about different areas for questions in your course.
- Be patient! Your teacher is expected to respond to your questions within 1-day, Monday to Friday. Many teachers respond faster than this, but you should be aware of this expectation.
- Don't be afraid to ask your site coordinator for help. If you are struggling to get answers to your questions, ask your site coordinator to call our office or file a support request. We are always happy to help provide you with additional support.

### Asking Questions

Each class has discussion boards for specific types of questions. Students will be provided with additional information in the course. **We ask that students not use email to communicate with teachers.** When students post questions within the course we can assist as needed.

- **Have a Question?** – In this discussion board, students post questions about course navigation, problems locating or posting assignments, or more details on assignment expectations.
- **Private Topic** – Each student has a private topic (PT) – this is where the student can communicate privately with the teacher if there are questions about grades, information about absences, or other private matters.

### Additional Suggestions

- Complete assignments in a word processor, then cut/paste the work into the assignment. This is helpful in case a technical issue creates a problem for posting work.
- Don't forget to click "Post" when you upload assignments, and for Dropbox work, check to make sure your files have uploaded before submitting your work.
- Don't be afraid to use the help link in your course to file a support request for technical support.
- If all else fails, call our office for support. We can be reached at 978-897-1900 between 8AM and 4PM Eastern time, Monday - Friday.



## Academic Calendar

Courses are either semester-length or full-year (two semester). Semester courses are 15 weeks long and full year courses are 33 weeks long, with a break in late December. Semester calendars are available on our web site prior to the start of each academic year.

All students must follow the [academic calendar](#) unless extenuating circumstances exist. If your school calendar differs you or your site coordinator must inform your teacher in advance to discuss options for completing work.

Flex and summer courses have unique schedules. Summer courses are offered in two four-week sessions and one eight-week session. Flex courses are self-paced, fifteen-week courses with rolling start dates.

## Grading and Late Work

### Grade Scale

Courses use a numerical scale with a grade of 60% indicating a passing score. You may receive an I for an Incomplete if you are not able to finish the course. See Incomplete Grades for additional information.

Your teacher submits grades in numeric format (i.e. 100, 99, 98, etc.). The grading system generates equivalent letter grades (i.e. A+, A, A-, etc.). Here is a conversion table:

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

### Grade Periods for Term and Semester Grades

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

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

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

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

Grade periods for full-year courses:

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

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

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

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

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

Flex and Summer School courses are graded in a single term containing all 4 or 8 weeks of work.

## Grade Over 100%

Teachers are not allowed to confirm grades over 100% in our Student Information System. If your grade is greater than 100% for a term, that grade will be confirmed as 100%. Additional points may not be rolled over to a later term.

## Grade Dispute

VHS Learning will review questions about your grade as needed. If you have a concern about whether your grade is accurate, you should speak with your site coordinator who will review our processes and help seek clarification through your teacher and VHS Learning as needed.

## Incomplete Grades

Teachers may allow you additional time to complete course work following the close of our marking period by issuing an Incomplete (I) for Term 1, 2, 3, or 4. The additional time allotted for completing work may not exceed two weeks from the end of the course, unless extenuating circumstances support a course extension. If this happens, speak with your site coordinator and teacher.

## Late Work

The policy outlined below describes the approach to late work in our semester classes. Summer and flex policies are outlined in a separate chapter at the end of this handbook. If questions about late work arise, please communicate with your teacher and site coordinator.

- Late work will be accepted up to one week past the due date with a penalty of 20%.
- Due to grade deadlines, the one-week late policy does NOT apply to the final week of a semester (Week 15/33). You must complete Week 15/33 week on time or seek an Incomplete or Course Extension from your teacher in advance of the last day of the week. See the Incomplete and Course Extension policies for additional details.
- The late work policy does NOT apply to course discussion and group assignments. Since course discussions and group work rely on communication during a given week, these assignments must be posted on time and will not be accepted late unless you have a circumstance that prevents you from attending class the entire week. Speak to your teacher if this is the case.
- Turning in late work more than once or twice per term is not acceptable. If you turn in work more than this amount you will not receive credit for late work.

At times circumstances out of your control, such as illness, weather-related events, family issues, or other major events, would require an exception to this policy. If this is the case, talk to your teacher in your private topic. Make every effort to contact your teacher before work will be late or as soon as possible after.

## Concussion Protocol

If you suffer a concussion during your course, your school and site coordinator must communicate with us regarding your status and their expectations. Your site coordinator will upload documents to your student profile in the Student Information System, update your “return to learn” status, provide expectations for workload, and share whether there are global exemptions required. In general, your course will be extended by one week for each week you are absent due to the concussion, for a maximum of four weeks.

If you will be absent for more than four weeks in a semester course due to a concussion, you should re-enroll in a future semester at no charge. If you are absent for more than four weeks in a year-long course, your school and curriculum team will review options for extending the course into the summer and hiring a substitute teacher.

### Course Audit Request

If you experience a hardship or medical issue and wish to audit the course (remain enrolled for the purpose of enrichment rather than earning credit), your site coordinator must file a support request that includes your name, the course name, and an overview of the situation that resulted in the audit request. This request will be reviewed by our Dean and/or Associate Deans.

If an audit is approved, your access will be changed so you can see content only. You will not be able to communicate with your teacher or classmates. Access to the course will expire when traditional student access is removed at the end of the semester. You will not receive a transcript or certificate of attendance for their course. Students who audit do not receive a refund for their tuition.

### Course Extension Request

You will be allowed to make up work past the end of a semester only if there is a verified extenuating circumstance that prohibited you from completing work on time. You and your site coordinator must communicate with your teacher in your PT about the work that you will be able to complete and the deadline for turning it in. Course extension requests are for up to one month from the end-date of the course. Please speak with your teacher and site coordinator if you believe you require a course extension

### Course Retakes

You must adhere to local school policy regarding retaking our online courses. If allowed by your local school, you may retake a course. You must work with your site coordinator to review additional details about this policy and ensure you meet our requirements.

## Course Level and Requirements

### Advanced Placement: Fees

All AP enrollments are subject to an additional AP fee, which covers the cost of materials. Certain AP courses also require a lab fee. Refer to our catalog for pricing and details.

### Advanced Placement: My AP Classroom

You are expected to access and utilize My AP Classroom resources as directed by your VHS Learning teacher. To access the My AP Classroom resources you will need a College Board account.

### Advanced Placement: Summer Work

AP courses have required summer assignments that are turned in during Week 1 of the academic year and graded by your teacher. Summer assignments are expected to take approximately 5 hours total and cover essential content for the course. If you enroll during late summer you can turn the work in through Week 3, though you are encouraged to finish summer assignments prior to course start if possible.

## Advanced Placement: Testing

If you enroll in an AP course, you are expected to take the AP exam and share your exam score. If you are failing your AP class, you do not need to take the AP exam. Exam results do not affect your course grade or future enrollment in courses.

Individually enrolled students must contact their local school or use the College Board process for homeschooled students to locate a testing site. Be aware of the timeline for this process; the College Board recommends contacting their AP Services for Students number (888-225-5427 or 212-632-1780) early in the fall to obtain names of local testing sites.

By enrolling in an AP class, you authorize your site coordinator or school administration to report AP examination scores to us.

## Course Levels

The level of each course is indicated in the [catalog](#). The catalog also contains prerequisite skills and course grade level. Here are some guidelines for what to expect in their course:

- A standard (college preparatory) level class requires approximately 6 hours per week.
- An honors level class requires approximately 8 hours per week.
- An AP level class requires approximately 10 hours per week.
- A middle school course is intended for enrichment and requires 3 hours per week.
- Summer and flex credit recovery commitments vary, described in detail in a future section.

## Document Formats Allowed

To ensure integrity of work and validity of student grades VHS Learning requests that students submit work in file formats that work within our plagiarism detection tool, such as text-based Microsoft Word or PDF files. Upon request, a VHS Learning student may be asked by the teacher to resubmit work that has been shared in a format that is not compatible with our plagiarism detection tool, such as scanned images, screenshots, or other image-based files that contain text

## Materials and Lab Kits

Certain courses contain materials that you must obtain on your own, including books easily available at local libraries or common materials to complete simple lab exercises in your home. Materials that you are required to obtain on your own are listed in the course description in the [catalog](#). If you are unable to procure the materials, you should work with your site coordinator to try to obtain the materials. If you are unable to obtain needed materials, you should inform your teacher and file a support request with details about the situation.

Certain courses require the purchase of a lab kit. Courses with lab kits are noted in the course description in the course [catalog](#). You must care for kit contents responsibly, follow directions carefully, and work independently to complete these labs. You and a responsible adult will complete a Lab Materials Use Agreement that will be signed and uploaded to your course. Refer to the Waiver Requirements policy for additional information. Lab kits shipped internationally may incur additional shipping and customs fees.

## Proctored Exams

Some courses have proctored exams. If you are enrolled in a course with a proctored exam you must comply with the exam process or you will receive a grade of zero on the proctored exam. Your teacher will provide details within your course.

## Waiver Requirements

Some courses, including lab science courses and physical education courses, require waiver documentation to be uploaded to the course. Waiver requirements are outlined in a course's description in the catalog. If you do not return the required waiver within established timeframes you will not be allowed to earn credit for assignments related to the waiver.

## Feedback on Course Content or Experiences

As an organization that provides quality learning experiences and is committed to continuous improvement, we value your feedback. We ask about our programs through our annual survey process. If you have a concern that needs attention during the academic year, please speak with your site coordinator and then file a support request so the information can be shared with the appropriate staff member for investigation and follow up.

## Student Responsibilities/Code of Conduct

### Acceptable Internet Use Policy

Our website and systems shall be used in a manner consistent with the purpose of VHS, Inc., the administrative rules for using the system, and according stated policies. Communications using our resources will be considered publications and will be governed by administrative policies and policies regarding publications.

You are expected to conduct yourself in a responsible, ethical, and polite manner while using our systems. You must not access material that is contrary to prevailing community standards or inappropriate for classroom use. If such inappropriate material is accidentally encountered, you must immediately stop use of that site or resource.

Access to our systems is a privilege, not a right. You have the responsibility to respect and protect the rights of other users in the community and on the Internet. Please act in a responsible, ethical and legal manner, in accordance with stated policies, in conformance with the purposes of the other sites, and in compliance with state and national laws. If you commit a violation your access privileges will be revoked, as well as whatever other disciplinary action may be assigned by local and VHS, Inc. administrators.

This policy cannot describe all possible behaviors by users of the system, so in any specific situation, you must exercise good judgment of appropriate conduct. To assist in such judgment, the following guidelines are offered:

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

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

You should not download or install any commercial software, shareware, or freeware unless you have written permission from the system administrator or other appropriate staff. Do not create or keep other people's work or intrude into other people's files.

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

Access or upload of material that has been deemed inappropriate for educational use is prohibited. Should you encounter such material by accident, please disengage immediately and report it to your teacher. In addition, creating and/or uploading any material that is inappropriate for educational use (text, video, images or other) is prohibited.

## Attendance / Participation

You are expected to attend and participate in your courses as fully as you would attend and participate in a face-to-face course. All work should be completed by course due dates. At an absolute minimum, you are required to log-in and perform work in your online courses three times per week. Ideally, you will access your online classes each weekday.

If you are absent due to illness (four days or more), you or your parent/guardian, may either contact the teacher directly (in your Private Topic) to notify your teacher of any delay in completing assigned work, or contact your site coordinator for assistance in coordinating make up work. It is your responsibility to make up work missed due to absence. Unless there are extenuating circumstances, work should be made up within one week of your return to school. It is your responsibility to be familiar with late work policy and attendance policies and to adhere to them.

If you do not participate in your course for ten days weeks you will be considered truant and will be dropped from the course at the discretion of VHS Learning. Summer school and flex participation requirements are outlined in separate policies.

## Anti-Harassment / Cyber-Bullying Policy

We are committed to safeguarding the right of all individuals involved in the school to work and learn in an environment that is free of harassment.

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

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

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

## Copyright Notice

Please understand that your course might contain copyrighted materials that are used in compliance with U.S. Copyright Law. Under that law you cannot save materials to your computer, revise materials, copy materials, or otherwise distribute them without permission. Materials accessed in this course are to be used in support of instructional activities for this course only and shall be limited to the duration of the course, unless otherwise specified by the instructor or owner of the material. You may only download or print materials if given permission by your teacher or site coordinator, who know which materials are copyrighted and which are not.

## Plagiarism/Academic Honesty

Submitting work that you claim as your own but derives from a source other than yourself without properly citing the source is considered plagiarism and is not allowed. There are serious consequences for students who plagiarize their assignments or discussion contributions.

We use TurnItIn, a plagiarism detection tool, to detect if your work has been copied from another source. TurnItIn doesn't just search the Internet – it also checks work against current and former student work in any course section.

To learn about how we approach plagiarism, review the policy on plagiarism and academic honesty here: [Plagiarism/Academic Honesty Policy](#).

## Respectful Discourse

Tone of voice and attitude can be difficult to convey in writing, but they are extremely important in an online class. We expect that you will treat your teacher and classmates with the same respect as you would treat your teachers and peers in your face-to-face school. Students who are disrespectful will be reported to their school and will be subject to consequences aligned with their school's Code of Conduct. Individually enrolled students may be removed from a course for lack of respect, in accordance with our Acceptable Use Policy. Here are some reminders about respectful posting in an online course:

**Use proper English:** It is easy to fall into the habit of using texting shorthand. This is a classroom, just like any other classroom. Use proper English and do not use unusual screen names, slang, or abbreviations in your posts.

**Choose words carefully:** When we talk to someone in person, they can hear our words and see our faces. In classroom discussions it is easy to be misunderstood. Read your post back to yourself to make sure your word choices convey your feelings.

**Don't make it personal:** Expressing your opinion is encouraged, but don't make disagreements personal.

**NO YELLING:** Refrain from using all capital letters – it is like yelling at your teacher or classmate.

**Keep it clean:** No profanity, links to inappropriate websites, or inappropriate images.

**Don't forget: all things you post in the course are recorded and saved,** including edit history on discussion posts.

## Social Media Platforms

Recognizing you might connect with classmates outside of your VHS Learning class using social media to make and maintain connections, students are discouraged from creating groups in social media for the purpose of completing work for their VHS Learning class. All VHS Learning discussions or group work must be completed within the learning management system in order to receive a grade.

## Special Education: 504 or Individualized Educational Plans (IEPs)

If you have a 504 plan or IEP you must work with your site coordinator to make sure they share the types of accommodations that you receive so that our teachers can make similar accommodations in your online class. We will work with your school to provide reasonable accommodations as outlined in your student's plan, such as extended time to complete assignments, modified workload, or modified expectations for discussion participation.



## Student Orientation

Prior to beginning courses, you will complete Student Orientation, a self-paced module that provides an overview of course structure and navigation. You remain enrolled in Student Orientation throughout the year. In addition, each course contains a module entitled *Start Here*, which introduces general academic policies, provides tips for time management and organizing work, and explains additional elements of our courses.

## VHS, Inc. Intellectual Property

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

## Privacy Statements

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

## FERPA Statement and Notification of Rights

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

eligible student of the decision and of their right to a hearing regarding the request for amendment. Additional information regarding the hearing procedures will be provided to the parent or eligible student when notified of the right to a hearing.

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

One exception, which permits disclosure without consent, is disclosure to school officials with legitimate educational interests. The criteria for determining who constitutes a school official and what constitutes a legitimate educational interest must be set forth in the school's or school district's annual notification for FERPA rights. A school official typically includes a person employed by the school or school district as an administrator, supervisor, instructor, or support staff member (including health or medical staff and law enforcement unit personnel) or a person serving on the school board. A school official also may include a volunteer, contractor, or consultant who, while not employed by the school, performs an institutional service or function for which the school would otherwise use its own employees and who is under the direct control of the school with respect to the use and maintenance of PII from education records, such as an attorney, auditor, medical consultant, or therapist; a parent or student volunteering to serve on an official committee, such as a disciplinary or grievance committee; or a parent, student, or other volunteer assisting another school official in performing his or her tasks. A school official typically has a legitimate educational interest if the official needs to review an education record in order to fulfill his or her professional responsibility.

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

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

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

## Data Security and Retention Policy

### Cybersecurity Framework and Risk Assessment

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

## Employee Training

All employees must pass a criminal background check and be fingerprinted. Employees complete ongoing training on best practices for information security, data protection and privacy regulations.

## Backups

Our systems are cloud-based and backed up daily in accordance with industry standards.

## Destruction of Data

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

Data cannot be recovered after destruction.

Data	Retention
Course transcripts	Indefinitely
Student data including assignment grades	5 years
Student assignment submissions and activity, communication, teacher feedback	5 years

All questions or concerns regarding our privacy or data retention policy should be directed to your Partnership manager or our Chief Privacy Officer at [privacy@vhslearning.org](mailto:privacy@vhslearning.org).

## Technology Requirements

Our courses use the Internet as the primary vehicle for instruction. Instructors use a web browser for the delivery of courses and students use a web browser to access their courses. You must have Internet connectivity and have access to the Internet daily.

Courses may contain links to outside websites, and while every effort is made to maintain these links, we cannot guarantee that users following links from within a course will not encounter sites hosting malware or viruses. We strongly recommend all users install malware/virus protection from a reputable vendor, and make sure that the definitions are updated regularly to prevent infection.

Students can view lesson content, submit course assignments and fully participate in most courses on mobile devices, including iPads, iPhones, and Android devices.

The following features within the learning environment will not work on portable devices:

- Flash content and software is not compatible with iOS devices (iPad, iPhone, iPod Touch).
- Courses which use installed software may require regular access to a desktop/laptop computer for installation and use.

To view specific technical requirements that may be required for each course, review the course descriptions in the [course catalog](#).

## Summer and Flex Courses

### Overview

Our Summer and Flex courses provide students with opportunities to complete courses in a more flexible manner. It is important that students consult with their local schools before enrolling into a Flex or Summer course to ensure the school will accept credit from the class. Summer and Flex courses are typically taken for credit recovery, though there are enrichment options available (such as the Criminology and Digital Photography summer options).

### Flex Course Pacing and Credit

Flex courses are designed for students that require flexible credit recovery and are motivated, independent learners. Courses are taught by licensed online teachers and enrollment is available on a rolling basis and students progress through the coursework independently and at their own pace.

You can take up to 15 weeks to complete a Flex course, though many students complete the courses within an 8-week timeframe. Flex courses earn variable credit, based on the amount of content covered in the course. Visit the [Flex page](#) for additional details about Flex offerings.

### Flex Course Tuition Refund

Flex tuition is refundable prior to the start of the class, less a \$25 administrative fee. Within the first week of the class, 75% of the tuition will be refunded. Refunds are not allowed after the first week of the course. Please note that Flex enrollments start within one day of registration, so the timeframe to receive a full refund is very small. You should be confident of your enrollment needs prior to enrolling in a Flex course.

### Summer School Course Pacing and Credit

In contrast to Flex courses, our Summer program is a paced, cohort-based course experience that provides students with the opportunity to explore new material or earn credit recovery in an NCAA approved credit recovery program.

Courses are either 4 weeks long (0.5 credit course) or 8 weeks long (1 credit course). There are two sessions to choose from for the 4-week courses (late June and late July start). The 8-week courses begin in late June and end in mid/late August. Students are required to login to the class daily and participate in weekly class discussions. Summer school courses are taught by licensed teachers who assess student work and interact with students regularly in class discussions and the student's private discussion.

Visit the [Summer School page](#) for additional details about the summer program and course/registration information.

### Summer School Late Work Policy

Late work will be accepted for ONE week from the due date and a 20% penalty will be applied to work submitted within that week. Work submitted after one week will not be accepted without prior approval from the course instructor.

### Summer School Extension/Incomplete Requests

You must complete all work for summer school courses within one week of the course end-date. If you are not able to complete work within this timeframe, you should enroll in the corresponding Flex course where you can re-submit completed work and finish the course at your own pace. Note: an additional enrollment fee for the Flex course will apply.

### Summer School Payment and Tuition Refunds

We accept school-subsidized payments or individual student tuition for summer school courses. You may pay by check, credit card, or request that your school be invoiced. If you withdraw from a summer course, you will receive a tuition refund according to the following:

1. A full refund, less a \$25 administration fee, will be granted if withdrawal occurs prior to the start date of the course.
2. 75% refund will be granted if withdrawal occurs within first week of the course.
3. No tuition refund will be granted if the student withdraws after the first week of the course or if the student is dropped for not adhering to the policies in the handbook.

### Credit Recovery

It is your responsibility to determine your school's acceptance of summer school course credit and Flex course credit for credit recovery.

## Parent Information

### Welcome

Welcome to our program! We are excited that your student will be joining us and look forward to helping them achieve their educational goals. We hope you have read the student handbook, so that you can understand the policies that guide our program. If you, or your student, have questions about the handbook, please do not hesitate to call our office at 978-897-1900.

### Benefits of VHS Learning

In our 20+ year history of working with students we have found that there are many benefits to completing an online course. One major benefit is that students can explore course content they may not be able to access in their local school – many students use our courses to take a possible field of interest for a test drive, to see if it might appeal to them as a future career.

In addition to the self-regulation, self-advocacy, and time management skills students gain, we have also found that students are able to be more reflective of their work. Our class discussion boards give students time to think before posting their response and they offer an opportunity for all students to be heard. Exposure to students from across the United States and from a variety of International locations is also enriching, especially in courses that explore content where global perspective is critical.

Last, but by no means least, our courses are a safe way for students to take online courses. Our rigorous, but supportive classrooms give students exposure to online classes, which will benefit them in their post-secondary pursuits. Many colleges are using blended or online courses as part of undergraduate programs – learning the ropes in the high school setting is a benefit many of our former students share.

### Parent/Guardian Communication with VHS Learning Teacher

The primary point of contact between a VHS Learning teacher and parent/guardian is the student's site coordinator. If you wish to communicate with VHS Learning, please have your child reach out to their site coordinator, who will open a line of communication with the teacher and VHS Learning team.

### Tuition Refund

If you have purchased courses on an individual basis and need to withdraw, you will receive a tuition refund according to the following schedule:

1. Full refund, less \$25 administrative fee, prior to start of class.
2. 75% tuition refund if withdrawal occurs during the first week of the course.
3. No tuition refunds after the first week of the course
4. Withdrawal date is the date the enrollment is dropped within the Student Information System or the date the drop is requested through our office (whichever occurs first).

**Note:** This refund policy does not apply to seats purchased in bulk through a membership or package discount.