

CATHOLIC HIGH SCHOOL HELPS PREPARE STUDENTS FOR COLLEGE WITH COURSES FROM THE VIRTUAL HIGH SCHOOL

SITUATION

Look at Bishop Fenwick High School's list of college acceptances for graduating seniors and you'll find the who's who of our nation's top universities—Harvard, Columbia, MIT and Vanderbilt, to name a few. Since 1959, when the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur roamed its campus, Bishop Fenwick High on Massachusetts's prestigious North Shore has been turning out the brightest and best college grads. Every year, more than 500 students come from a diverse set of nearly 50 towns in Mass, and neighboring New Hampshire, to partake in the school's rigorous curriculum and award-winning sports teams.

SOLUTION

VHS first began in 1996 as a federally-funded grant project created to provide online courses to Massachusetts high school students. Having heard about VHS and being intrigued by the ability to use their newfound technology in a unique way, Linda Kuzara, Bishop Fenwick's Director of Technology, traveled to Hudson, Massachusetts, VHS' first member school, to learn more about the program.

"I was impressed from the get go and saw the opportunity for VHS to really enhance what we were offering at the school," said Kuzara.

In alignment with VHS' collaborative model, the organization's standard membership offered the school 25 student seats in VHS courses per semester, and required that the school provide a teacher to be trained in, and teach, a VHS course along with a designated VHS Site Coordinator to oversee the program. Confident

In 1998, well before online classes were introduced, the school added wired network and internet access to their infrastructure – making it one of the more technologically advanced high schools in the area. It was also around this time that administrators began looking for more college-prep electives to round out their rigid curriculum, but were still unsure how to go about offering them. It wasn't until they heard about The Virtual High School (VHS), the pioneers of K-12 online learning, that they even envisioned that technology could collide with education to provide what they were seeking.

that the program was in the best interest of the school, it didn't take long before Kuzara had appointed a French and music teacher, and Kuzara herself completed the training to be the school's Site Coordinator.

Kuzara's first step was to work with the school's other educators and administrators to ensure that Bishop Fenwick students only registered in courses that were not currently offered at the school. This was to reaffirm that the VHS program would not compete with their face to face curricula. Then, she created a student application and enrollment process that is currently still in place today. Students apply to participate in the program during their course selection time, and the application form captures interest level, school activities and their top two VHS course choices to enroll in. Upon the School receiving a student's application, Linda and her team look at things



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Sister Geraldine
Vice Principal, Bishop Fenwick High School



- ▶ VHS Partner for 15+ years
- ▶ Online courses complement existing curricula
- ▶ College Readiness Program
- ▶ Advanced Placement® courses
- ▶ Equip students with 21st century skills

continued

like course selection and pre-requisites, as well as teacher comments on report cards to determine if the student is the right fit. Upon their application being approved, the student takes home a contract to sign with their parents.

"It's not just about grades because we've seen B and C students do great in VHS courses," said Sister Geraldine, Vice Principal for Bishop Fenwick High School. "We try to look at the college's point of view before approving each individual VHS course."

Due to the School having only 25 seats per semester for over 500 students, they try to limit the number of VHS courses that each individual student can take so as to allow ample students the opportunity to participate.

"The same process that we used to implement the program 15 years ago is the same process we use today," said Kuzara. "It just works for us."

about the organization

Founded in 1996 and headquartered in Maynard, MA, The Virtual High School is the pioneer of K-12 online learning. Since then, the nonprofit organization has been setting the standard for quality online education. VHS provides engaging courses taught in global online classrooms for secondary school students and online professional development in 21st century teaching best practices for educators. The organization also meets the unique educational needs of schools through custom course development, private course offerings, and support for blended learning initiatives.

VHS' design and delivery standard was the model used by the National Education Association in their recommended standards for online learning. The organization has won numerous awards, including the Stockholm Challenge Award for Global Excellence in Information Technology and is a three-time winner of the United States Distance Learning Association's (USDLA) award for Excellence in Programming and Excellence in Best Practices.

RESULTS

Since the program started 15 years ago, student course selection has been all over the map with classes such as AP® Statistics, AP® Psychology, AP® Environmental Science, The Holocaust and the business courses all being very popular. "Even though we offer an AP® course in each discipline, the VHS AP courses have been extremely popular," said Kuzara.

"The benefits of VHS are multi-faceted, the content is part of it, but it's the way of learning. By the end of each student's time in a VHS course, I see a huge difference in their technological confidence. As students going to college they will need to be taking more online courses and as professionals they will need to keep learning how to learn and how to use different protocols. We hope to be able to increase the number of seats we have in VHS in the next year so that we can offer it to more students," said Sister Geraldine.



"I was impressed from the get go and saw the opportunity for VHS to really enhance what we were offering at the school. Immediately we signed up and began implementing the program."

Linda Kuzara
Director of Technology,
Bishop Fenwick High School

