



Burlington Public Schools

VHS and 1-to-1 iPad initiative prove to be winning combination for suburban school

Located less than 15 miles from Boston, Burlington, Massachusetts is like many middle income suburban communities one might find near a major U.S. city. High-tech companies and medical facilities dot the town's landscape, the local shopping mall is the place to be and high school sports are the highlight of the community. Although Burlington High is part of a typical town, the school itself is anything but ordinary.

Home to over 1,000 high-achieving students, Burlington High School is known for breaking records, whether it's their award-winning cheerleading, hockey, gymnastics and softball teams or exceeding state academic averages. However, it wasn't until 2008 when the district's new superintendent came on board that the school and its students would truly realize its full potential.

In 2008, education industry veteran, Eric Conti, became the new superintendent of the Burlington Public Schools and immediately began looking for ways to improve upon what the district was doing. "We needed to find a way to better engage students and help them more effectively prepare for work and education in the real, and increasingly digital, world," said Conti. "My team and I immediately began putting a plan together that would infuse more technology into the district so as to mirror the environment that students were getting outside our walls."

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*Eric Conti, Superintendent
Burlington Public Schools*

Conti's first plan of attack was to partner with The Virtual High School (VHS), with the idea that the school would aggressively move towards a 1-to-1 initiative in the coming year. Conti had used VHS online courses and resources at his past two school districts and was familiar with the program. "By partnering with VHS, our students are able to take all of the electives and AP courses they need and want to while gaining the technological skills needed to prepare them for college."

Following a successful pilot under the direction of the School's Support Services Coordinator, Joe Attubato, Burlington High became a full-fledged member of VHS, which consists of the school freeing up a teacher to be trained in and teaching a VHS online course as well as 50 student seats per year in VHS courses. The following semester, VHS courses were incorporated into the school's program of studies. Today, students who desire certain electives or need to make up courses apply for VHS classes with staff evaluating such criteria as the student's grades and course selection.

Initially, VHS students were assigned to the school library where they would complete their coursework. In the second year of the VHS program, the school began to gear-up for the 1-to-1 initiative and a major change in how they delivered both the VHS program as well as their own in-person courses. A wireless network was implemented, teachers were given electronic devices and 30 iPads



were made available for instructors as needed. However, it wasn't until the school's 1-to-1 iPad initiative came to fruition during the third year of the VHS program that the school would realize online learning's full potential.

In 2011, using funds within its existing budget by eliminating costly computer labs and foregoing printed textbooks, every student was given an iPad complete with email to help facilitate 21st century learning. VHS students at Burlington now have the flexibility of working on their online coursework at home or during the school day, and manage their time accordingly. In addition, using the iPad's, students have been able to better demonstrate what they've learned in both their online and in-person classes through multimedia projects, videos, designing digital posters or even creating a web site rather than just answering multiple choice questions.

As a result of the VHS program being coupled with the 1-to-1 initiative at Burlington High School, students and faculty have seen their efforts pay off in more ways than one. Students are able to expand their program of study with courses they are interested in, which has resulted in improved test scores, overall higher engagement and greater success. The school is now experiencing a 100% pass rate on MCAS (Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System) exams and 95 percent of their graduates are going on to college. Moreover, engagement among students and teachers, as well as parents is higher than ever too.

One thing that's been rewarding for Attubato, the school's designated VHS Site Coordinator, is seeing students able to take the courses they need and want, and have it contribute to their success. One student, who is now at Harvard, was able to take four AP classes that he needed thanks to the VHS program. Another student, who intends to major in Veterinary Medicine, has taken several VHS' courses that aren't offered at Burlington High to help prepare her for college.

Due to the success of the VHS program, the school has recently begun sharing their VHS seats with 8th grade students at their districts middle school, Marshall Simonds, to help prepare them for high school. Burlington High is also considering offering on-site virtual courses, potentially using a VHS private offering, which enables VHS member schools to offer private online or blended learning classes just for their students.

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The Virtual High School (VHS, Inc.), a non-profit leader in blended and online learning, offers a variety of programs and curriculum to meet the needs of schools, students, and families. To learn more visit www.VHSLearning.org.

