

Kinneret Katz



The Virtual High School fosters a great intellectual learning environment online and paves the way to college success for this home-schooled student

For home-schooled students, the process of earning a high school diploma is a bit more complicated than it is for “traditional” pupils. Those complications extend into the higher education world, where some colleges accept home-school diplomas and others require GED® test scores as part of the application process.

That requirement won’t be a problem for Kinneret Katz, an 18-year-old high school senior who has attended Orthodox Jewish schools for years in Los Angeles before moving into the home-schooled environment in 10th grade. “I’ve used VHS for the majority of my studies,” said Katz, who previously attended Harkham-GAON Academy, “and those courses have prepared me above and beyond for the GED.”

Katz is applying to 10 different universities, including Barnard College, Washington University in St. Louis, and Franklin & Marshall. She’s already taken three out of the four GED segments and scored above the 90th percentile on all of them.

A humanities enthusiast whose favorite VHS courses included AP® World History, AP® Art History, AP® English Literature, and Eastern/Western Philosophy, Katz wants to major in English, History, or Asian Studies. She said

the blended learning she was exposed to while enrolled at Harkham-GAON Academy helped her make a smooth transition over to online learning.

“We did our secular studies online and our Judaic classes in a traditional format,” Katz explained, noting that when she was in 10th grade, the school was using VHS for secular studies. “Through that experience, I learned that the VHS platform was both academic and rigorous in nature. I learned a lot through it, so I decided to keep using it.”

This year, Katz signed up for her first Online Judaic Studies Consortium (OJSC) course. Acting as a “bridge” for educators, scholars, students, and communities, OJSC, developed by VHS, incorporates a collaborative model of course instruction and teacher participation to develop and then utilize online courses to teach students who are enrolled in the program.

Through this collaboration, Jewish Day School students take innovative Judaic studies courses from the OJSC catalog, taught by expert faculty from Jewish Day Schools around the country. In comparing the rigor and interest level of her OJSC courses versus those taken in a traditional setting, Katz said that the former is definitely up to par.

In assessing the VHS program, Katz highlights these three advantages:

- **More control over her schedule, work pace, and study environment.** A self-proclaimed introvert, Katz thrives when she has quiet study and reflection time, versus trying to get things done in a group setting. She also likes being able to make her own schedule on a week-to-week basis and work at her own pace to accomplish the assignments due each week.
- **Opportunities to collaborate with peers and make new friends.** The idea that home-school and virtual learners are isolated from their friends and social opportunities is a misconception. "There is definitely a social aspect to VHS," said Katz. "I've made some great friends in the information chat rooms that I've also been in touch with outside of class."
- **Leverage her strengths as a very "visual" learner.** Because most of the material is presented in a textbook or article format, Katz can tap into her strong visual learning capabilities and easily engage with and learn from the content. "This is a lot easier for me to understand versus a traditional classroom lecture," she said.

In every VHS course that Katz has taken so far, she's participated in discussions and group work. "Even though it seems like you'll never get to know the other 30 people during the course of the semester," she explained, "the truth is that you really do come away with a greater sense of everyone's personal perspectives and voices on specific topics."

When working on group projects, Katz and her peers collaborate for a minimum of two to three weeks, using messaging applications to discuss those projects, divvy up the duties, and critique and comment on one another's work. "It really feels like a traditional school group project," she said.

Citing self-discipline and good time management skills as two of the primary requirements for online learning success, Katz has used other platforms (both as a home-schooled student and at her previous high school) and said VHS is "one of the better programs" out there right now.

"I really do think the other kids who are learning with VHS are of a really high caliber," said Katz. "Even in my non-AP® and honors classes, the ones who are interested and motivated really help create a great classroom environment."

Katz said VHS' teachers play a key role in helping their students succeed online. "Our teachers are truly interested and not just babysitting and grading your work; they're also active participants in the classroom, and helping everyone dig deeper," said Katz. "Cumulatively, VHS really fosters a great intellectual learning environment."



At-a-Glance Facts

Origin

Began in 1996 via a U.S. Department of Education Technology Innovation Challenge Grant. Operating as a non-profit organization since 2001.

Current Cohort of Schools:

More than 600 schools

VHS Benefits

- Student-Centered, asynchronous courses
- Small class sizes
- Expanded Core and Elective Course Offerings
- Emphasis on Collaboration, College & Career Readiness
- High-Quality Teachers

Online Learning Program Offerings

- Large Advanced Placement® Catalog
- Honors & Unique Elective Courses
- Core Courses, including STEM Programs
- Gifted and Talented Offerings
- College and Career Readiness
- Summer School
- Credit Recovery Courses
- Professional Development for Educators
- Unique courses designed for custom populations, such as the OJSC

The Virtual High School (VHS, Inc.) is a non-profit global collaborative of schools committed to expanding educational opportunities for students and educators.