

# Virginia Virtual Academy

Herndon, Virginia

A partnership between Virginia public school divisions (districts) and Stride provides a tuition-free full-time personalized online education to kindergarten through twelfth grade students across the Commonwealth of Virginia.

Virginia Virtual Academy is a tuition-free virtual public school program, offering a flexible approach to online learning to kindergarten through twelfth grade students across the Commonwealth of Virginia. Stride online curriculum, and state-certified Stride teachers and administrators form the School's foundational education program.



Since its opening in 2010, VAVA has offered families an alternative to the traditional brick-and-mortar learning environment, providing a rich curriculum and a balanced approach to its education program. Suzanne Sloane, Head of School, said, "We strive to create a balanced approach in educating our students that provides the support and student-centered focus required to meet the needs of students as unique and individual learners, and we work to strengthen our learning community through developing

age-appropriate school outings to museums, local historical and cultural sites, college campuses, and other engaging field trip locations across Virginia. Events such as these bring families together and create real connections within the VAVA community, while providing enriching opportunities that complement the curricular interests of our students."

VAVA provides extensive support to both parents and students through a rich fabric of Stride teachers and support staff. In grades K–8, teachers work closely with a parent or caring adult who serves as a "learning coach" to the child, helping to facilitate their progress and modify pace and schedule as needed.

In 2020 VAVA had its first graduating class, with 13 of their 56 graduates completing their high school requirements in three years instead of four. VAVA reports that its graduation rate for both 2020 and 2021 was 100%.

## How Virtual Learning Works at VAVA

All kindergarten through twelfth grade students at VAVA are offered a complete range of core subjects, including English/language arts, math, science, history, art, music, and physical education, as well as electives and world languages. The curriculum content includes a robust catalog of Stride online curriculum, complemented by **textbooks, workbooks, and a wide range of hands-on instructional materials and manipulatives.** Advanced learners at VAVA also take advantage of the Advanced Placement courses and the dual enrollment program for college credit.

VAVA students work with one or more Virginia-licensed Stride teachers each day. Teachers facilitate daily live, interactive video sessions with their students for each class, called Class Connects. In addition to the scheduled Class Connects, students complete Stride online lessons and offline activities on a flexible, but rigorous schedule at home or anywhere with an internet connection. Teachers stay in close contact with students and

## VIRTUAL SCHOOL

Type of school:  
**Full-time online public school**

Grades served:  
**K–12**

Program started:  
**2010**

Students served by program:  
**7,127** Total  
**3,901** Elementary  
**2,005** Middle & High  
**1,221** Alternative

Ethnicity  
**59.8%** White  
**22.4%** Black  
**10.6%** Hispanic  
**6%** Asian  
**.7%** American Indian  
**.5%** Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander

Free/reduced-price lunch:  
**27%**

Instructional model:  
**Full-time online instruction**

## PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

The Virginia Virtual Academy (VAVA) is a tuition-free virtual school program of eleven public school divisions in Virginia offering state-wide enrollment.

Stride provides the online curriculum, state-certified teachers, and administrative and support staff.

Over 7,000 students across the Commonwealth of Virginia were served by VAVA in the 2020-2021 school year.

The school's first two graduating classes, 2020 and 2021, achieved a 100% graduation rate.

Nearly one in four 2020 graduates completed their high school studies in three years instead of the typical four-year program.

VAVA offers numerous Advanced Placement and Honors courses, in addition to many extracurricular activities, such as national clubs, E-Sports, National Honor Society, and a student leader program.

families via phone, email, and the Online School platform to ensure they are supported and challenged.

To encourage student socialization, VAVA offers many extracurricular activities, such as K12 national clubs, E-Sports, National Honor Society, a student leader program, and student advisory councils. Learning coaches and students are encouraged to attend extracurricular gatherings at least four times per year to promote non-academic socialization.

To get students and families off to a strong start, VAVA provides a beginning of year orientation for both students and parents or caregivers. Students learn how to use their technology for learning, including how to interact with their teachers and submit assignments. Parents and learning coaches are trained on how to monitor student progress and support students during their learning process. The learning coach role is most critical in kindergarten through 8th grade. As students enter their high school years, the lessons become more self-directed, and students are supported to work more independently. During the first few weeks of school, VAVA administers diagnostic tests for each subject area to determine the best grouping for students and Class Connect assignments.

### A Typical Week for a VAVA Student

A typical week for a VAVA student includes weekly preparation time, daily Class Connects, and independent study time on Stride online lessons and offline academic and social activities. Some students may choose to focus on one subject a day, while others work on multiple subjects each day. To achieve satisfactory progress, VAVA students are expected to average about six hours on schoolwork each day, depending on grade level.

#### A Typical Week for a VAVA Student

##### Weekly Preparation

On Sunday nights, learning coaches are encouraged to help students prepare for the week ahead, including gathering appropriate materials, manipulatives, books, and other preparation appropriate for each subject area.

##### Teacher-led Live Video Classes – Class Connects

Several days during each week, a student engages in regularly scheduled Class Connects for each subject, led by their VAVA teacher and attended by other students assigned to the same class. Students directly interact with their teachers and other students during Class Connects. If a student is struggling, they may be required to attend more Class Connects for extra support and differentiated instruction. When a student is excelling, they can work more independently and may engage in fewer Class Connects. If a student does not attend Class Connects on a regular basis, the VAVA support team will intervene to help get the student back on track.

##### Independent Study – Stride Online Lessons and Offline Activities

In addition to the scheduled Class Connects, students engage in online and offline independent Stride lessons and activities on a more flexible, personalized schedule throughout the week. Stride online curriculum is aligned to the Virginia Standards and adapts to student performance, allowing them to move at their own pace. Data are collected in every lesson through student activity, as well as formative and summative assessments. To move to a new lesson, students must master the objectives. The adaptive curriculum is designed to move quickly through content the student understands well, as gauged by lesson assessments, while focusing on the content areas students are struggling with. Through the Stride learning platform, students schedule and plan the order of their online lessons and review their daily attendance and progress. VAVA educators are available via phone, email, and web conferencing to support students and learning coaches at home. VAVA educators schedule meetings as needed to provide personalized support.

## Faculty and Staff Provide Comprehensive Support

When it comes to student success, VAVA faculty and staff provide comprehensive support. Teachers and support staff constantly monitor student progress to ensure students are progressing on a regular basis. Sloane explained, “Our teachers review data, which may indicate, for example, that some students have completed five lessons really quickly and some others might be logging on at 1:30 in the morning. At that point, our staff will reach out to students and parents to try to understand any issues and develop specific supports for those students.” For example, a student may benefit from a schedule change to better support their learning in a particular subject. Each student’s schedule is unique based on their learning and support needs and their interests. Learning coaches are periodically asked to attend meetings with teachers to stay informed of their child’s progress.

VAVA has implemented a three-tier engagement and compliance program to help support student needs, as follows:

- Tier 1 – Universal Student Supports: All students receive basic interventions to increase academic outcomes and engagement.
- Tier 2 – Increased Interventions: Universal supports have not been successful and additional layers of support are added.
- Tier 3 – Compliance and Administration: Student is not making progress. Attendance may be a concern. School administration gets involved.

Additional support for students and family learning coaches is available 24/7 via web conferencing, email, and phone for:

- Customer Care – assistance using the learning management system, shipment of materials.
- Technical Support – for Stride-issued equipment or systems.
- Enrollment Support – assistance with enrolling students.

Approximately seven percent of VAVA students qualify for special education services that can include academic support by licensed special education teachers, speech therapy, occupational therapy, and psychological evaluations. When students qualify for special needs, VAVA will provide 504 and/or IEP learning supports to students, including custom curriculum, special testing environments, and assistive technology. Most special needs students are supported through a co-teaching model that consists of a general education teacher and a special education teacher working in tandem through Class Connect sessions. Special education teachers additionally work with students one-on-one to meet and accommodate their needs.

Approximately twenty-seven percent of VAVA students are considered economically disadvantaged. This status is designated if a student is eligible for free/reduced-price meals or Medicaid, receives TANF (Temporary Assistance for Needy Families), or identifies as either migrant or experiencing homelessness. VAVA has a family support team and a family resource coordinator to support these families with academics and wrap around supports, including mental health, food security, family-related issues, and more. While this wide range of supports is available, Sloane emphasizes that these supports are offered rather than pushed on families. Sloane said, “We’re here to help as needed, but we don’t want to intrude in places where it’s a parent’s decision.”

English learners are supported through an immersion program that adapts to students’ needs in math and language arts. In the 2019–2020 school year, VAVA had 47 active English learners receiving support, with approximately half being closely monitored to provide increased levels of support.

Additional support provided by VAVA includes school counseling, mental health support, diagnostic achievement testing to measure growth, college and career counseling, and intensive academic intervention programs.

## Cohesive VAVA Program Produces Exemplary Outcomes

VAVA administers beginning, middle, and end-of-year growth assessments for all students in all grade levels. This data shows a direct, positive correlation between the length of enrollment at VAVA and student growth in both reading and math. In addition, VAVA reports that students, regardless of how long they are enrolled, excel in the school and exceed state proficiency in many areas of the state assessments.

VAVA achieved a 100% graduation rate for both 2020 and 2021, the school's first two graduating classes. While VAVA does not collect data on their students' college test scores, admission rates, and matriculation to 2-year community colleges and 4-year colleges/universities, their graduates are regularly accepted into universities across the United States and beyond.



Grade 4 Reading proficiency ranged from **84 to 87%** while the state ranged from **75 to 79%** between 2016 and 2019.



Grade 7 Reading proficiency ranged from **83 to 94%** while the state ranged from **79 to 82%** between 2016 and 2019.



Grade 8 Reading proficiency ranged from **86 to 91%** while the state ranged from **76 to 77%** between 2016 and 2019.



Grade 8 Math proficiency in 2018–19 school year was **85%** while the state was **77%**.



High school Biology proficiency levels ranged from **85 to 86%** in years 2016 through 2019, while the state ranged from **82 to 83%**.



Earth Science proficiency in 2019 was **87%** while the state average was **81%**.