

Westfield Virtual School

2021-2022



DISTRICT CORE VALUES

- ✓ Inclusive school communities
- ✓ Student-centered relationships
- ✓ Relevant and rigorous learning



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Table of Contents

District Vision Statement	4
Theory of Action	4
Core Values	4
Mass General Law Chapter 71 Section 94	4
Department of Elementary and Secondary Education Process	4
Key Components of the Virtual School (DESE)	5
School Culture and Family Engagement	5
Equal educational opportunity	5
Staff	5
Curriculum and instruction	5
Assessment	6
Accountability	6
Enrollment restrictions	6
Reporting	6
Organizational capacity and experience	6
Public accountability	7
Learning supports for students in an online environment	7
Additional supports and interventions for special populations	7
Time and learning requirements	7
Non-consumable instructional supplies	7
Connectivity	8
Westfield Virtual School Description	8
Vision and Mission	9
Response to Documented Demand	9
Application Process	9
Family Commitment	10
School Culture and Family Engagement	10
Equal Educational Opportunity	10
Educational Program	11
Educational Experience of Enhanced Quality	11

Staff	12
Instructional Methodology and Curriculum and Instruction:	12
Assessment	13
Time and Learning Requirements	13
Non-Consumable Instructional Supplies	13
Connectivity	13
Accountability	13
Reporting	14
Public Accountability	14
Attendance	14
Supports and Intervention for Special Populations	15
Specialized Student Focus	15
District Capacity for Success	15
Westfield Virtual School 2021-2022	17
Plan Development Committee	17
References	18

District Vision Statement

Westfield Public Schools collaborates with our community to provide rigorous, inclusive educational experiences that promote academic, emotional, and social growth to become lifelong learners and to empower students with knowledge and skills for future success in college and career.

Theory of Action

If we design and implement a rigorous instructional program aligned with staff development, then our students will achieve a high level of success as evidenced by multiple measures.

Core Values

- ❖ Inclusive school communities
- ❖ Student-centered relationships
- ❖ Relevant and rigorous learning

Mass General Law Chapter 71 Section 94

...(b) On or before October 1, the board shall issue a request for proposals to establish 1 or more commonwealth virtual schools; provided, however, that the board shall not be required to issue a request for proposals for any school year for which a certificate is not available to be awarded. The request for proposals shall be published on the department's website. Persons or entities eligible to submit a proposal to establish a commonwealth virtual school shall include, but not be limited to: (i) a school district; (ii) 2 or more school districts; (iii) an education collaborative; (iv) an institution of higher education; (v) a non-profit entity; (vi) 2 or more certified teachers; or (vii) parents. Private and parochial schools and for-profit entities shall not be eligible to submit a proposal. A proposal shall be selected from the responses to the request for proposals and an applicant awarded a certificate under the procedures adopted by the board.

As established under G.L. c. 71, § 94, a virtual school is operated by a single school district that enrolls only students who live in that district. Such schools do not require a certificate, a board of trustees, or an enrollment cap. The district, however, must provide a summary description of the proposed virtual school to the Commissioner for review and comment at least four months in advance of opening the school.

Department of Elementary and Secondary Education Process

School Committees interested in developing and operating a District Virtual School must submit a summary description of the proposed virtual school and complete an information document provided by DESE. All summary descriptions must include information about the proposed

school's mission, educational program, instructional methodology, services, how this potential school will enhance options for students, how this school will make online education as good as or better than face-to-face delivery, any specialized student focus, and the district's capacity to make the school a success. The summary description must also address key components of a Single Virtual School.

The Department of Elementary and Secondary Education reviews each submission describing the proposed virtual school, along with the information sheet, and provides feedback to School Committee members based as required by law. Once finalized, the School Committee will vote whether to authorize the district to operate a District Virtual School and to submit the final proposal and summary description with a Statement of Assurances to the Department.

Key Components of the Virtual School (DESE)

- **School Culture and Family Engagement**

As a public school, the district and school must plan to deliberately support students' social and emotional health in a safe, respectful, inclusive, and equitable learning community that engages students, families, and the broader community. The school must create an environment that supports all students' sense of belonging and helps students develop social and emotional knowledge, skills, and competencies for a multicultural world. The school develops collaborative relationships with all families/guardians and effectively communicates with them about the academic progress and social emotional well-being of students.

- **Equal educational opportunity**

As public schools, district virtual schools must not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, creed, sex, gender identity, ethnicity, sexual orientation, mental or physical disability, age, ancestry, athletic performance, special need, proficiency in the English language or a foreign language, or prior academic achievement.

- **Staff**

All teachers hired by the District Virtual School must be licensed in Massachusetts in the areas in which they teach, pursuant to state law. All educators must be evaluated consistent with [regulations](#) promulgated by the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education and [guidance](#) developed by DESE. In addition to licensed teachers, a District Virtual School must have a Massachusetts-licensed [school nurse](#) (RN), a special education administrator, an attendance officer, and, if the school serves English learners, a licensed English Language Learner (ELL)/English as a Second Language (ESL) teacher.

- **Curriculum and instruction**

A District Virtual School must provide curriculum and instruction aligned with the standards contained in the [Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks](#). A District Virtual

School may choose from available curriculum aligned with the frameworks, or develop curricula aligned with these standards that reflect the mission of the school and that are designed to meet the needs of all students enrolled by the District Virtual School.

- **Assessment**

All students educated with Massachusetts public funds, including all students enrolled in a District Virtual School, are required to participate in state assessments. The award of a high school diploma includes the requirement that students earn a Competency Determination (CD) in ELA, mathematics, and STE. ACCESS for ELLs tests are administered annually to measure the proficiency of ELLs in reading, writing, listening, and speaking English, as well as the progress they are making in learning English.

- **Accountability**

The School Committee has final approval over whether and under what terms a District Virtual School operates provided those terms comply with state and federal law. District Virtual Schools operate within the Massachusetts School and District Accountability System.

- **Enrollment restrictions**

Only students who reside in the district may be enrolled in the District Virtual School. School Choice students are not eligible.

- **Reporting**

Once established, a District Virtual School is assigned a school code. Like all public schools, a District Virtual School is responsible for submitting data and filing reports with the Department in a timely and complete manner in accordance with guidelines published by The Department. The Department, in turn, publishes reports on all public schools in Massachusetts.

- **Organizational capacity and experience**

A strong District Virtual School Plan defines the mission of the school; develops policies and changes with district and school committee approval when required at the local level, when appropriate; hires qualified staff to manage the school's day-to-day operations; holds the staff accountable for meeting established goals; and formulates a long-range plan that ensures the school's continued stability. In addition to its many other responsibilities, the district school committee must ensure that the school is complying with all applicable state and federal laws. The District Virtual School leadership and staff must possess a wide variety of skills and qualifications that enable them to develop, open, sustain, operate, and continuously improve an effective school in collaboration with the school district.

- **Public accountability**

The school committee that oversees that District Virtual School must operate consistently with laws relating to public accountability, such as the open meeting law, the conflict of interest law, and the financial disclosure law.

- **Learning supports for students in an online environment**

Every District Virtual School must take appropriate and necessary steps to ensure that access to and engagement in the educational program is provided to every enrolled student. The Department expects virtual schools to have strong protocols, tools, and practices because virtual learning takes place remotely and implicitly poses unique challenges.

- **Additional supports and interventions for special populations**

A District Virtual School must provide a program that addresses the unique characteristics of the online learning environment and responds to these unique needs appropriately. Students with special learning needs, including English learners (ELs) and students with disabilities, will require additional supports to ensure they are able to access the whole curriculum, make substantial progress in acquiring the knowledge, skills, and behaviors presented by the curriculum, and participate fully in all aspects of the school experience.

- **Time and learning requirements**

Every District Virtual School must meet the Massachusetts Time on Learning requirements of state law unless it requests and is granted a waiver of those requirements.

- **Non-consumable instructional supplies**

State law requires schools to purchase textbooks and other instructional materials and supplies intended for use and re-use over a period of years. Schools then in turn "loan" those instructional materials free of charge to students, who must return them at the end of the school year. Costly tools such as chromebooks or other computers or graphing calculators fall in the category of instructional materials and supplies that, similar to textbooks, are intended for districts to purchase and use and reuse over a period of years. If such technology is required, the school may encourage each student to purchase these devices. Students are likely to do so because they may need those devices for future classes and other use outside of school. A District Virtual School, however, must be prepared to provide such devices free of charge to students whose families do not choose to buy them or cannot afford to do so. If students need such devices to complete out-of-school assignments, the District Virtual School must also provide that access.

- **Connectivity**

A District Virtual School must also be prepared to arrange internet access or connectivity if families don't choose to buy it or cannot afford to do so. If students need connectivity to complete assignments, the District Virtual School must also provide that access.

Westfield Virtual School Description

Westfield Virtual School is a K-8 school serving up to 210 students who reside in Westfield.

There is one virtual classroom at each grade level, with up to 20 students per classroom in grades K-2 and up to 25 students per classroom in grades 3-8. The student day will be 8:00 am - 2:30 pm. Lunch and Exploration time will be scheduled from 11:30 - 12:30 daily at all grade levels. Teachers will work from 8:00 am - 2:45 pm.

Westfield Virtual School will be supported by a principal, a school adjustment counselor, a nurse, and a secretary. Nine full time general education teachers, one early education paraprofessional, one special education teacher (depending on need), and one English as a Second Language teacher (depending on need), several related service providers, and six part time Special Subject teachers will make up the school staff. District intervention staff may be assigned to work with students in the WVS based on assessment data. A special education supervisor will oversee IEP development and work with special education teachers and related service providers providing services in the virtual environment. Content supervisors and instructional coaches will provide support to the WVS teachers by meeting with teachers to review student data, determine instructional strategies that engage students, and determine high quality instructional materials for use with students.

Westfield Virtual School's full time staff will work from a location within the community, but not in an existing Westfield school building. This will allow for optimal school and district level collaboration and provide a space for any in person meetings as well as a meeting place for any in person field trips or social experiences.

Each K-4 classroom will be taught by one classroom teacher, and K-2 classrooms will receive additional support by one shared classroom paraprofessional. Students in grades 5-8 will have a homeroom teacher who will also teach one of the four content areas. Students will have a team of teachers instructing in English Language Arts (Reading and Writing), Mathematics, Science (Science, Technology, and Engineering), and Social Studies. Students will have opportunities for

Special Subjects in areas of the Arts, Wellness, Computer Science, Engineering, and World Language.

- **Vision and Mission**

In keeping with the WPS Vision to provide rigorous, inclusive educational experiences that promote academic, emotional, and social growth and to empower students with knowledge and skills for future success in college and career, WPS is committed to offering this unique educational pathway for students in K-8. The Mission of the Westfield Virtual School is to engage students for whom virtual learning works best, while still keeping students connected to their community and providing instruction through the Westfield Public Schools curriculum by Westfield Public Schools educators. We recognize that not all students achieve to their personal best in our current physical environment, and we know the power of voice and choice in educational decisions. Westfield Virtual School will remove barriers to learning for some students that brick and mortar schools cannot.

- **Response to Documented Demand**

The demand for the Virtual School is evidenced by preliminary survey results from the MidYear Learning Check In Survey from February 2021 to which 967 families responded. Families that indicated interest in a Virtual School at the K-8 level represented 143 individual students. 58 families registered for two Parent Information Sessions that took place in April and May 2021. In addition, our direct outreach to families with students who are currently homeschooling or attending TECCA, Greenfield Virtual Academy, or private schools indicates that at least 7 families would be interested in returning if a Virtual School option were available. These results helped inform our decision to select the grade levels K-8 and to project for one class at each grade level. We selected our personalized learning / student interest focus to expand upon our current Learning Pathways offered at the high school level. Our current Learning Pathways are based on student interest, and we plan to create opportunities for these interests to be fostered at earlier grade levels to provide as much development as possible before a student would enter high school.

- **Application Process**

Families that choose to apply to attend WVS will complete an application form that provides basic student and parent information. New students enrolling in the district will complete the application as part of the registration process. Current students will complete the application form to request a change in enrollment from their current

assigned school to WVS. In the event that there are more applicants than seats available at a particular grade level, the selection will be made through a lottery process.

- **Family Commitment**

By applying, the family intends for their student(s) to attend WVS for at least one full school year. Once the application process is complete, each family will meet with the School Leadership Team to review the expectations for student attendance and the role of the home Learning Coach. A Learning Coach is a parent or other adult that will monitor daily attendance, support student learning, facilitate student exploration of personal goals, and communicate regularly with teachers and staff.

- **School Culture and Family Engagement**

Strengthen an environment and school culture that celebrates diversity and responds effectively to the social emotional experience of every student and family is one of three District Strategic Objectives in our 2021-2024 Strategy for Continuous Improvement.

Our district is participating in the Safe and Supportive Schools Equity work offered by DESE, and we partner with International Center for Leadership in Education (ICLE) to provide professional development in the Rigor, Relevance, Relationships framework. Our ICLE consultant, Linda Jordan, will work directly with the Principal of the Westfield Virtual School to create an action plan for this work that is focused on School Culture and Family Engagement in a virtual environment. Weekly communication between teachers and parents/guardians will ensure that families are informed of academic progress and social emotional well-being of students. A full time School Adjustment Counselor will provide support to all students through classroom lessons, and students that require Tier 2 and Tier 3 support will work in small groups and/or 1:1 with the counselor. For students requiring more intensive counseling, families will be referred to work with River Valley Counseling Center (RVCC), our partner in Mental Health. An RVCC clinician will be assigned as a member of the staff, collaborating with the School Adjustment Counselor and Principal, and working directly with the family for insurance billing. All staff members of the school will partner with families in a way that is strengths-based, culturally responsive, and collaborative. Language translation services will be provided as needed to support all communication. In-person social events for students and families will be offered to develop and strengthen relationships, as well as the option of in-person meetings between staff and families.

- **Equal Educational Opportunity**

Enrollment in WVS will be an equal educational opportunity for any Westfield student in grades K-8 regardless of race, color, national origin, creed, sex, gender identity, ethnicity, sexual orientation, mental or physical disability, age, ancestry, athletic performance, special

need, proficiency in the English language or a foreign language, or prior academic achievement.

- **Educational Program**

The school structure will be a single school environment for grades K-8. The benefits of this model are supported by research and are known to promote the following: higher academic achievement; stronger sense of ownership and fewer school transitions; opportunities for student leadership; and continuity of instructional content and approaches. Students in grades K-4 will have a self-contained model of instruction with one teacher, while students in grades 5-8 will work with a team of teachers with different areas of specialization. Special subject areas will be selected in part based on student interest. All students will participate in Wellness, including PE and Health standards as well as the five areas of competence outlined in the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) framework, and Arts, including Visual and Media Arts, Music and Dance, and Theatre standards. World Language, Computer Science, and Engineering courses will also be available to students. The student day will be 8:00 am - 2:30 pm. Lunch and Exploration time will be scheduled from 11:30 - 12:30 daily at all grade levels. Exploration time is an opportunity for students to work toward personalized learning goals developed with their teachers that focus on special interests and competencies students want to achieve. Students will work with their home Learning Coach, who will facilitate student Exploration time. Students will have opportunities for extracurricular clubs and intramural sports. These may occur within the K-8 school community and will also be available to Virtual School students at other school sites. Opportunities for in-person social events and field trips will also be provided. The WVS will utilize the Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS) Framework to support the overall social and emotional health of students and staff. Through the use of SWIS data, Tier 2 and 3 supports such as Check In / Check Out will be implemented based on student need as part of the Multi-tiered System of Supports (MTSS).

- **Educational Experience of Enhanced Quality**

At WVS, online education would be as good as face to face education, and for some students, better, because we would focus on the three tenets of Rigor, Relevance, and Relationships with intention for a virtual environment. By developing strong relationships between students and families and teachers, students will be connected and engaged in the same way they are for in-person learning. This will require weekly communication with parents, which is more frequently than teacher / parent communication occurs in traditional school buildings. Parents selecting this school environment for their students are choosing to engage in a more specific partnership with

teachers in the learning process. As learning coaches, parents will work together with teachers to support learning and to guide their students' exploration of learning that has meaning to them. By providing the same rigorous curriculum based on Massachusetts Frameworks and coupled with the relevance, students will experience as their learning becomes more connected to their personal lives and goals, we can ensure the success of our Virtual School students.

- **Staff**

All teachers will hold Massachusetts licensure, and they will be hired by an application process with input from a diverse hiring committee that will include multiple stakeholders (e.g., administrator; teacher with remote teaching experience; student with remote learning experience; parent of a student who wishes to attend WVS). The WVS hiring committee will seek candidates who possess:

- an aptitude for technology-based instruction
- engaging and dynamic personalities and an ability to develop a rapport with students and families virtually
- evidence of creativity and flexibility in lesson design, pedagogy, and delivery
- a commitment to providing students choice and ownership over their learning

- **Instructional Methodology and Curriculum and Instruction:**

Teachers will utilize the [Instructional Strategies](#) that support student engagement. Westfield promotes the Universal Design for Learning ([UDL](#)) approach to instruction with the intention to make learning for all students both rigorous and relevant. Through a Multi-Tiered System of Support ([MTSS](#)), we address academic as well as social-emotional / behavioral learning. The Westfield Virtual School will allow opportunities for personalization of learning through the balance of synchronous and asynchronous instruction. When students are engaged in asynchronous instruction, teachers can meet 1:1 through synchronous instruction to set goals for personalized learning priorities. Students will be able to share interests, and with their teacher, they can determine learning goals and competencies to be met throughout the year. (ie Babysitting Course Certification, Culinary exploration, etc.) Teachers will work 8:00 am - 2:45 pm. By scheduling asynchronous learning time for the last 15 minutes of the day, coupled with the 15 minutes beyond the student day, teachers will have 30 minutes daily for collaborative planning time with colleagues. Teachers will work together to integrate units of study based on the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks. K-4 teams will meet to plan instruction that allows for individual student needs to be met though flexible multi-age groups, project based learning units, and in consultation with related service providers, special education teachers, school counselors, ESL teachers, and the principal.

Grade 5-8 teams will meet to plan interdisciplinary units, project based learning units, and to consult with related service providers, special education teachers, school counselors, ESL teachers, and the principal.

- **Assessment**

Westfield Public Schools uses PowerSchool Performance Matters to bring together all our student data in one integrated platform, giving us a more holistic view of students' instructional gaps to allow teachers and administrators to identify and address individual student needs. Examples of these data are MCAS, ACCESS, local benchmarks, attendance, EWIS, and other student data, allowing us to correlate various data sources to make informed instructional decisions. Students in the Virtual School will participate in required state testing and engage in local assessments (e.g. i-Ready Math and Reading Diagnostic Tests) 3 times per year. Teachers will embed formative assessment throughout daily instruction, and common interim assessments will be developed to monitor student progress. Teachers will engage in regular data meetings during which they will follow Westfield Public School's data review protocols in order to make data-driven instructional decisions for individual students and identify students that will receive additional intervention.

- **Time and Learning Requirements**

The WVS will meet the Time and Learning requirement. The district does not intend to seek a waiver.

- **Non-Consumable Instructional Supplies**

We will provide all non-consumable instructional supplies such as textbooks, calculators, math manipulatives, and durable science lab materials. We will provide students with a Chromebook and / or other necessary technology.

- **Connectivity**

We will arrange for connectivity if families don't choose to purchase it or cannot afford to do so. Families will be asked to provide information regarding their connectivity status, and we will arrange to provide access through a Verizon hotspot. We will also work with our community partners at the Westfield Gas & Electric Company to provide fiber access when possible. Fundraising efforts by the community during the course of the pandemic will ensure availability of internet access if additional purchases are needed.

- **Accountability**

The Westfield School Committee will operate the WVS under established Westfield Public Schools policies and according to state and federal law. The WVS is subject to the Massachusetts School and District Accountability System.

- **Reporting**

The WVS will submit data and file reports with the Department in a timely manner in accordance with guidelines set forth by the Department. The WVS will be included in all published reports on public schools in Massachusetts compiled by the Department.

- **Public Accountability**

The Westfield School Committee will operate consistently with laws relating to public accountability, such as the open meeting law, the conflict of interest law, and the financial disclosure law.

- **Attendance**

Westfield Public Schools, including the Westfield Virtual School, requires a high level of participation in engaged learning. Regular school and class attendance enables students to benefit from classroom discussions, presentations and interactive activities. These shared academic experiences are integral to the learning process and cannot be re-created or replicated. Massachusetts law requires compulsory attendance for all students. M.G.L. chapter 76 §1 states that all children between the ages of six and sixteen must attend school.

Examples of when students may be excused temporarily from school attendance are:

- Illness, injury or quarantine as documented by a doctor or other medical professional
- Bereavement/funeral or serious illness within the student's family
- Religious holiday
- Required court appearance
- DCF Commitment
- DYS Commitment

A child may also be excused for other exceptional reasons with approval of the Principal or his/her designee. Parents/guardians will provide a written explanation for the absence or tardiness of a child in order for that absence or tardiness to be excused. This will be required in advance for types of absences where advance notice is possible.

Examples of unexcused absences may include, but may not be limited to:

- Repetitive or chronic absence or tardiness due to illness or injury not documented by a doctor or other medical professional
- Truancy
- Undocumented absences
- Family Vacations: We strongly discourage family vacations when school is in session. In addition to compromising the attendance law, family vacations

interrupt the educational process in each subject area in ways that make-up work cannot reverse. Teachers are not required to provide work in advance of a family vacation.

- **Supports and Intervention for Special Populations**

All Virtual School students will have the same access to the multi-tiered systems of support available to all WPS learners. Acknowledging the unique challenges of virtual learning, we will provide additional support to our special populations of students such as English Learners and students with disabilities. All staff members that work with these students will attend regularly scheduled collaboration sessions to ensure that support is consistent and relevant to the student's current needs. These meetings may include the Parent and/or Learning Coach. Students with special needs will be provided instruction and services as reflected in their Individual Education Plans.

- **Specialized Student Focus**

The specialized student focus of the Westfield Virtual School is personalization of learning based on interest. WVS will create success plans for every virtual learner that are based on student needs and interests. Students will meet 1:1 with staff members to determine interests and set learning goals. Students will be guided toward experiences and supports that are aligned with their interests and Learning Pathways that support their goals. There will be an integration of competencies and certifications that can be earned by students. Examples would include CPR and First Aid certification, Babysitting certification, Boy Scouts / Girl Scouts badges, Wright Flight, and other experiential learning. This component will allow students to explore areas of interest as they grow and learn. There is a daily Exploration time scheduled for this purpose. The personalization of learning will benefit all students, through student agency, giving students voice and choice in their learning. Students will be assigned to special subject area classes based on interest rather than grade level assignments or random assignments through scheduling. For example, a student that chooses to pursue an interest in world languages may begin language classes much earlier than is current practice in the district.

- **District Capacity for Success**

Westfield Public Schools successfully executed a plan for Hybrid and Remote Learning during the pandemic that met all Student Learning Time requirements and effectively engaged students in learning. WPS successfully returned staff to work in person by securing space in the community to operate a Remote Learning Center for staff members' school age children. WPS collaborated with community partners, Boys and Girls Club and YMCA, to provide Remote Learning support for 200+ students during their hybrid remote weeks. These accomplishments demonstrate the ability of WPS to meet the needs

of students and families within changing parameters. Due to staffing needs at the K-4 level, we operated the 20 remote classrooms as a separate K-4 school rather than affiliating with each of six elementary schools. Teachers worked with students from multiple elementary schools, and they created classroom communities that were unique. We learned many lessons through this endeavor, and we have the building blocks in place to create a K-8 virtual school community within our district. We have a collaborative relationship with the Westfield Education Association, and we have already begun negotiations regarding agreements for the Westfield Virtual School.

Westfield Virtual School 2021-2022
Plan Development Committee

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Christopher Rogers, Administrator of Student Interventions and Safety

Denise Ruzala, Director of Assessment and Accountability

Chris Tolpa, Principal, Franklin Avenue School

References

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Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, *Guidance on Single District Virtual Schools in Massachusetts*, (April, 2021).