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annual report

Innovative Education Online

2002

Virtual High School



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FROM THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER

During this fiscal year, VHS successfully grew from a grant-funded operation into a fiscally sound non-profit organization. In a year infused with unsettling economic news, this was no small accomplishment. But circumstances have only reinforced our commitment to and belief in the strength of our status as a non-profit. Unlike for-profit corporate online course developers, the bottom line at VHS is about offering our member schools the highest quality courses at the lowest possible price. We are beholden only to our goals of high instructional standards, responsiveness to our member schools, and affordability. Building a sustainable non-profit focused on success—from student performance and teacher professional development to new member orientation and technical support—is our challenge and our vision. Our track record speaks for itself. Our VHS member schools serve over 190,000 students, and we maintain a greater than 90% completion rate for students in their VHS NetCourses. This year's member fees supported all VHS operations, including NetCourses, online professional development courses, technical services and support, administrative and management services, as well as marketing and communication. Our success is a testament to our vision and our focused attention to affordability.

At the same time, VHS, Inc. has remained focused on the educational benefits to students in our online courses. Students are able to pick from a pool of experienced teachers who not only have instructional expertise, but who have completed the “gold standard” in professional development for online instructors. Schools have also made better use of their existing technology in educationally sound ways. These efforts have been recognized by the NCAA Initial-Eligibility Clearinghouse, which approved the core academic courses offered by VHS for NCAA eligibility. Our innovative online education was also recognized by an international jury and awarded the Stockholm Challenge Award 2001, which recognizes projects that make good use of information technology and result in a positive impact on people's lives. In making the award to VHS, the jurors stated that Virtual High School was a tested, sustainable program that could be used worldwide. The jury “was strongly impressed by the project's cooperative model that gives schools access to resources and training in exchange for them creating and sharing their own resources online.”

Recognition by the Stockholm Challenge was gratifying, but VHS continues to face the real challenge of explaining to schools not only *why* VHS is an effective teaching tool but *how* to integrate VHS into an existing school curriculum and use it as a supplementary learning option. To this end, we worked closely this year with national policymakers, including the National Education Association, the American Association of School Administrators, the National Association of State Boards of Education, the National School Boards Association, and corporate supporters CNA, IBM, and Verizon Communications, and consultant Kathleen Fulton, to produce *The Guide to Online High School Courses*, a book exploring the issues that must be addressed when states and school districts design Web-based classes. These efforts strengthen our aim of doing it right the first time. Schools do not have the time nor do they have the resources to endure a painfully long learning curve or to experiment with untested methods. VHS expertise allows them to hit the ground running.

As a non-profit organization, our focus is on providing high-quality online education to schools, regardless of their size, wealth, or location. Our greatest strength is our global, cooperative school membership, which provides students and teachers alike the opportunity to participate in a worldwide community of learners. Our success as a non-profit is directly related to the success of our member schools.

Through collaboration, we all benefit.



Liz R. Pape

Liz Pape
CEO and Treasurer

Lewis & Clark's Expedition: An Interactive Journey

Course Description

Participate in the Lewis and Clark Expedition of 1804-1806 which charted the Louisiana Territory, acquired by the United States from France.

Students participating in this unique NetCourse follow the voyage of the famed 19th century explorers Meriwether Lewis and William Clark as they search for The Northwest Passage. As part of their journey, students study maps and how the explorers used them. Class participants also “meet” historical figures such as Thomas Jefferson, and “speak” with him in his Monticello home about his hopes for the journey.

As part of their studies, students participate collaboratively with members of the course, and group portfolios are combined into a class portfolio, which is shared with each student’s school and town library, Lewis and Clark study groups, and perhaps even the Library of Congress.

“The skills and knowledge you acquire will help you appreciate your country a little more, especially the many brave explorers who pushed westward into a vast new territory,” says the Lewis and Clark NetCourse instructor Tom Anderson. He adds, “Most people don’t know that the expedition didn’t just travel and make maps. They discovered many plants and animals, and they met, lived with, and talked to many Native

American tribes of that time. Their journey set the stage for further discussion and, unfortunately, strife for the remainder of the 19th century. It was a truly colossal and mind boggling adventure which changed the course of our nation’s history.”

A student enrolled in the Lewis and Clark course wrote, “I never realized how significant the journals from the Lewis and Clark expedition could be. They truly provide massive insight into the journey as well as significant history of the society during that time period.”

As we celebrate the bicentennial of Lewis and Clark’s journey, it is appropriate to reflect on how 21st century tools allow us to journey into the past to learn lessons about the future.



“It is important that the people in our nation remember the history of this expedition, because it shows how the world has changed in two hundred years, and how much more we know.”

Jordan, a VHS student

OUR BELIEFS

VHS believes that educational opportunity need not be limited by barriers of time and place and lack of qualified faculty. Rather, we believe that high-quality education is possible—today—for all students in all locations. Online education offers any school with Internet connectivity a wealth of trained, experienced faculty members qualified in numerous disciplines for teaching a wide array of courses designed to meet the needs of all students. An innovative, standards-based curriculum delivered online offers diverse, exciting learning choices for students, and the opportunity and skills to participate in a national and global community.

VHS believes that online teaching should augment rather than replace traditional classroom teaching. The Virtual High School's online courses are a proven, flexible solution for schools needing an expanded curriculum, teachers seeking new horizons, parents wanting more involvement with their children's education, and a society grappling with ways to offer opportunity to all its citizens.

VHS believes that the goals of education are advanced best by putting value and service first. When schools work together in a collaborative network such as VHS, they become part of an abundant and generous educational community that promotes the affordable sharing of professional resources.

OUR MISSION

It is the mission of VHS, Inc. to break down the barriers to quality education for all. We want to expand educational opportunity by continuously enriching our curriculum offerings to member schools and by offering online teachers a wealth of professional development courses to expand, deepen, and improve their instructional skills. We strive to develop innovative, student-centered online courses designed and delivered to meet and exceed nationally accepted standards for education. We believe in spreading the word about the benefits of online education, while also relentlessly striving to improve, adapt, and expand its value to schools, parents, teachers, and students.

“Hey guys, I will miss you all. I have come to appreciate you so much. See, I come from a tiny school (49 kids in my class) and we only have your basic classes. I know I've said it before, but it's so awesome to be in a class with people who want to be in it. So I hope that some of us keep in touch, even if it's a quick email to say hi. I wish all of you well, and I hope to meet some of you in the future in vet school.”

A student in the VHS course “Preveterinary Medicine” wrote to her classmates on the last week of class.

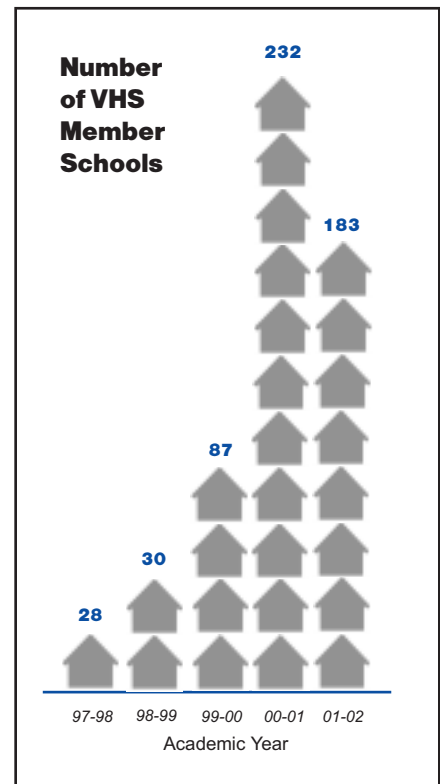


“VHS students acquired the technology-based reasoning and communication skills needed for the 21st century information society.”



VHS AT A GLANCE

During this 2001-2002 school year, staff at VHS, Inc. have successfully transitioned Virtual High School from a grant-funded program to a self-sustaining non-profit. This was accomplished during many months of planning prior to VHS Inc.'s incorporation and implemented before and during the incorporation. Of primary importance was communicating information about the membership fee and tuition costs to all the VHS schools in enough time that schools could budget for these costs. Through timely communication to school administrators, VHS was able to retain nearly two-thirds of the schools that were participating during the last year of the grant (2000-2001). This enabled VHS to maintain a course catalog with a variety of innovative, rigorous online courses to meet the needs of its students.



“We need to provide a means for students to access, no matter their zip code, the best that America’s educational system can offer.”

Ruth Adams, VHS Dean

Schools

During the last year of the grant, VHS continued to provide online professional development to new teachers interested in having their schools participate in VHS. With the addition of the Teachers Learning Conference (TLC) and fall and spring Netcourse Instructional Methodologies (NIM) professional development graduates, VHS had a total school mem-

bership for the 2001-2002 school year of 183 schools offering a total of 134 course sections. During that transition, a small number of schools were not able to continue their participation in Virtual High School because of budgetary considerations, and school membership dropped slightly.



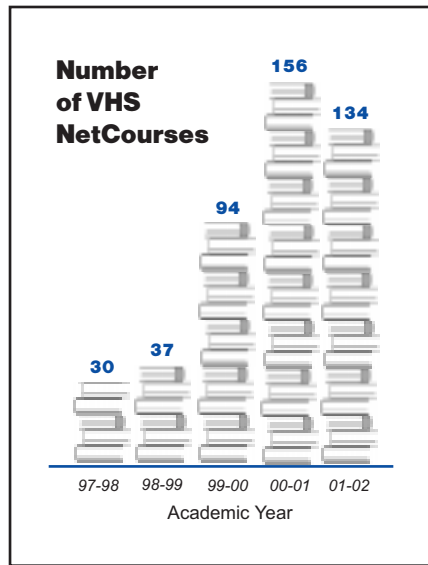
“The jury was strongly impressed by the project’s cooperative model that gives schools access to resources and training in exchange for them creating and sharing their own resources online.”

Stockholm Challenge Award 2001, jury statement



NetCourses

Over the five years that VHS has been delivering NetCourses to participating high school students, the number and variety of courses has increased from the initial 30 NetCourses that the first group of teachers designed to a maximum of 156 course sections. From 1997 to 2001, membership in Virtual High School was sustained through U.S. Department of Education Technology Innovation Challenge Grant funding. From the 2000-2001 school year to the 2001-2002 school year, Virtual High School transitioned from grant funding to non-profit operations. During that transition, a small number of schools were not able to continue their participation in Virtual High School because of budgetary considerations.

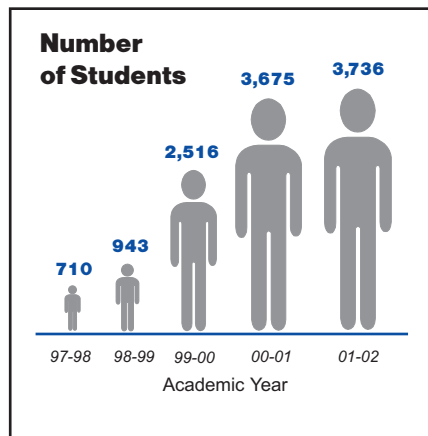


VHS Student Erica Quigley enrolled in the NetCourse "Entrepreneurship." She became a recipient of the Young Entrepreneur of the Year Award from the National Foundation for Teaching Entrepreneurship for development of a business concept to create Erica's Closet. "[This] has been my dream for years. Now I know that my dream is established enough to become a reality."

*Erica Quigley, VHS Student
Perkiomen Valley High School*

Students

The number of students participating in VHS NetCourses includes both fall and spring semester students. Most VHS NetCourses limit enrollment in each course section to a maximum of 25 students. The average class size of VHS NetCourses is 17 students. During the 2001-2002 school year, although the number of schools participating in VHS decreased, the number of students taking VHS NetCourses increased, as schools worked to maximize the benefit obtained from their membership fee.



2001-2002

183 School Members
134 Course Sections
3,736 Students



Art History: Renaissance to the Present

Course Description

**Designed to emulate
a college level survey
course, Art History
visits virtual museums
worldwide and spans
500 years of visual art
and history.**

Have you ever wanted to learn more about art history or visit a world-renowned art museum, but due to location or resource limitations were unable to do so? Students taking the VHS NetCourse “Art History: Renaissance to Present” have the opportunity to explore art from around the world – without leaving their local schools.

Through their “visits” to museums all over the world, students analyze the connections between various types of art that have been created for the past 500 years. As part of their studies, students collaborate on an Internet research project on the art of a non-Western culture, research an artist from the past and present a paper to the class, and find examples of architecture influenced by the Renaissance in their local communities.

By taking art history through Virtual High School, students, including those in rural areas, are exposed to art in ways not otherwise possible. This unique blend of technology and creativity meets a growing need in these times when arts and cultural programs are increasingly cut due to budget constraints.

“Taking an art history course over the Internet is more interactive, less impersonal, and ultimately more educational than the traditional entry level art history course: a large, dark lecture hall with someone clicking through slides at the front of the room,” notes Susan Jarvis, instructor and developer of the Art History Netcourse. “In my course, images of art work appear on an individual student’s screen. The student can spend as much time as she or he wants with each work, zoom in on details, simultaneously view two different works, and, at the click of a button, summon up reams of virtual pages of information on that one work. Students control their viewing, their reading, and their own learning.”

“Taking an art history course over the Internet is more interactive, less impersonal, and ultimately more educational than the traditional entry level art history course.”

Susan Jarvis, VHS instructor



ACTIVITIES AND ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Awards

Stockholm Challenge 2001 Award for Education.

Speaking Engagements

National School Board Association Technology & Learning Conference, Nov. 7-10, 2001, Atlanta, Georgia.

“Online Classroom, Online Community,” Liz Pape, Ruth Adams, Karen Sumaryono.

ASCD Conference, March 9-11, 2002, San Antonio, Texas. “The Three C’s of Online Learning: Content, Classroom and Community,” Liz Pape and Ruth Adams.

Massachusetts Superintendents’ Technology Learning Conference, Oct. 3-4, 2001, Sturbridge, Massachusetts. “Online Classroom, Online Community,” Liz Pape, Augusta Patterson, and Ruth Adams. “Online Professional Development for Administrators,” Liz Pape and James Nolan.

Conference Exhibitions

National School Board Association Technology & Learning Conference, Nov. 7-10, 2001, Atlanta, Georgia.

New York State Association for Computers and Technologies in Education, Nov. 18-20, 2001, Albany, New York.

Christa McAuliffe Conference, Nov. 27-29, 2001, Nashua, New Hampshire.

AASA, Feb. 15-17, 2002, San Diego, California.

NASSP, March 1-3, 2002, Atlanta, Georgia

ASCD, March 9-11, 2002, San Antonio, Texas.

National School Board Association Conference, April 5-7, 2002, New Orleans, Louisiana.

NECC, June 17-19, 2002, San Antonio, Texas

Publications

Guide to Online High School Courses, by the National Education Association, Virtual High School, Inc., and AASA, with assistance from CNA Corp., IBM Corp., NASBE, NSBA, Verizon Communications. Kathleen Fulton, Editor, 2002.

VHS, Inc. Network, a newsletter of the Virtual High School. Fall 2001.

VHS, Inc. Network, a newsletter of the Virtual High School. Spring 2002.



Writing & Telecommunications: Write On for Real

Course Description

In this course, “Write” stands for outstanding polished essays that have gone through the writing process. “Real” stands for real audience and real purpose.

Can real high school Language Arts students improve their writing skills, publish their works, and at the same time, form partnerships with students from across the globe? They can, if they are participants in the Virtual High School NetCourse Writing and Telecommunications: Write on for Real.

Students in this course engage in collaborative, long-distance writing projects with other students from all over the world. As Stephen Olivo, instructor of Writing and Telecommunications, notes, “The main focus of this course is learning circles, the brainchild of Dr. Margaret Riel, University of California at Irvine. Each of the eight or so international schools comprising the learning circle introduces themselves, sends out a Student Survey, hosts a writing proposal, and addresses topics provided by their long-distance peers. By the end of the semester students will see their writing published in both booklet form and on the Web.”

Natalie, a student enrolled in Writing and Telecommunication, shared this reflection – “I do enjoy the writing in here, if nothing else because it lets me have fun

with the topic. I like that in this class, we don’t have to take everything seriously, I can write a love letter to my toes if I want. It’s the greatest outlet for creativity! I love writing, it’s so much fun. You know, I read through the VHS catalog today, and there are so many really, really cool classes I wish I could be taking right now instead of all my regular classes I’ve taken at school. It’s great.”

“I love writing, it’s so much fun.”

Susan, VHS Student

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VHS DEAN

VHS staffing is critical to the successful design and delivery of VHS NetCourses. This year Ruth Adams joined VHS as the Dean of Curriculum and Instruction. Ruth is an Apple Distinguished Educator, one of *21st Century Magazine's* Top Twenty Outstanding Educators, and a Worcester County, Mass., Woman of Distinction.

Ruth brings many years of teaching and educational technology integration experience to VHS. She has designed and delivered web-based courses, and has served as a training facilitator for VHS's online teacher training program. Her most recent position was as the English/Technology Integration Specialist at Shrewsbury High School in Massachusetts. She holds a B.A. from the University of Massachusetts, and a M.A.T. from the University of Vermont. Ruth's main focus at Virtual High School is to oversee the course development procedure for new VHS teachers and courses, the ongoing professional development of existing VHS teachers, and the delivery quality of VHS NetCourses.

"I believe that in the future of learning, there is a need to provide a means for stu-

dents to access, no matter their zip code or their parents' income, the best that America's educational system can offer," says Ruth. "There is also a need to allow students the opportunity to participate in a global community of learners by actually being in 'classrooms' with students from around the globe. I am pleased to join Virtual High School as its Dean as VHS has proven that it is not simply a dream to harness the power of the Internet to ensure equal access to quality, challenging courses for all students—it is a reality."

"Here at Hudson High School students are offered an alternative to the ordinary classroom environment. . . . The attraction to VHS lies in the variety of courses available, student independence, and a step away from the traditional classroom. Each year, as schedules are being finalized and classes chosen, there is a natural draw towards VHS. Like most high schools, Hudson High cannot possibly offer courses in every area of student interest. However, VHS presents a wide spectrum of academic possibilities. From the convenience of a school computer-lab or from home, courses can be taken in anything from Aeronautics to Music Composition."

From the Hudson High School, Massachusetts, "Program Announcement for Parents," by Sam Blazar, VHS Student.

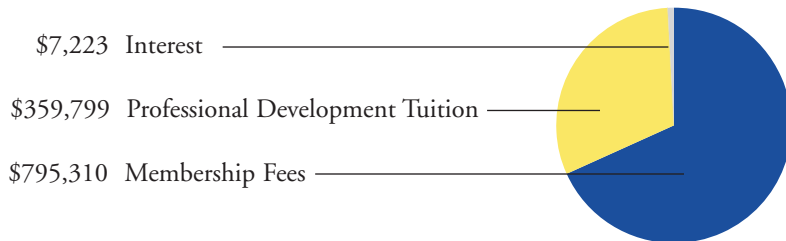
"Good teachers want and need to constantly improve their skills. They know they need to learn updated teaching methods and adapt to evolving times."

Ruth Adams, VHS Dean

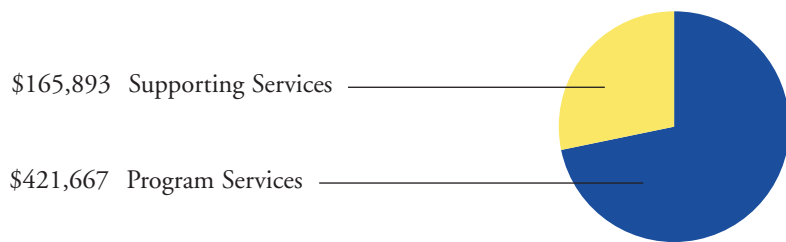


FINANCIAL SUMMARY

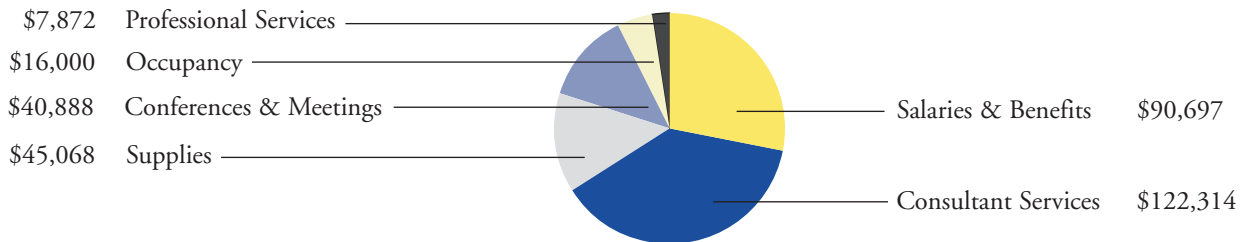
Revenue



Expenditures



Expenses Paid
by Hudson Public Schools
and The Concord Consortium
Under the TIC Grant



VHS, Inc. became operational on October 1, 2001, upon the scheduled completion of the Virtual High School's U.S. Department of Education Technology Innovation Challenge Grant. Expenditures for this fiscal year are only for the nine-month period ending June 30, 2002. Prior to October 1, 2001, all VHS-related expenses were grant funded.

An extension to the VHS Technology Innovation Challenge Grant received by Hudson Public Schools of Massachusetts and The Concord Consortium supported spending for transition costs related to VHS, Inc. This allowed the Virtual High School to become a self-sustaining entity, to provide additional professional development for more VHS teachers, to disseminate information about VHS, Inc., and to provide online learning.

It is anticipated that in future years expenses for professional development and dissemination will be incurred by VHS, Inc.

THE FUTURE

As a leader in online education, our challenge in the coming year is to exceed our already high standards for success, by pushing the envelope in the areas of course design and delivery standards, online pedagogy, online student assessment, teacher professional development, and teacher certification. Where we lead, others follow. Our country is in a critical period of educational reassessment, and many educators and parents are looking for innovation and demonstrated achievement. These goals may at first seem contradictory, but VHS has proven in its six year history that they go hand-in-hand.

A goal of the coming year is to increase the number of VHS member schools. By sharing the overall cost of operation more widely among a greater number of member schools, we can economize the cost to individual member schools. Attracting additional schools will also increase the variety of courses we can offer students. Imposing demands have been placed on schools in the coming years to improve the measurable success of students. VHS started out as an experiment, and it has turned into an innovation with a reliable success record. We are committed to working with our member schools—who are the backbone of our success and the source of our inspiration—to build a valuable program that addresses their current needs. With this in mind, in the coming year we will increase the number of Advanced Placement courses, including biology, calculus, economics, and German, as well as continuing to offer AP Statistics.

We are also excited to announce that VHS will be a development site for International Baccalaureate courses. During 2002 we had several meetings with International Baccalaureate organization staff, during which VHS was selected to develop online IB courses. We will be piloting the development of these courses during the 2002-2003 school year, and we are looking forward to adding IB courses to the 2003-2004 course offerings.

In the coming year we will work with the U.S. Department of Education to hold a forum addressing the trends, needs, and policy issues facing virtual schools and online learning. At the same time, VHS will be developing online summer school courses for credit recovery, and enrichment and preparation courses for advanced courses. We also will be increasing the number of online professional development courses for VHS teachers, as well as continuing to refine our professional growth model. Good education continues to be about the relationship between teachers and students. VHS will continue to improve that relationship. Online education, when designed and delivered with care and high expectations, can enhance communication between students and teachers, as well as among students. VHS students frequently say they feel more comfortable expressing themselves in online class discussions, where disability, social status, racial and even gender differences are not as evident as they would be in a traditional classroom.

continued next page

“It is important for students in a small school district to realize that although the school has few students and teachers, it can still achieve excellence. Our students have become aware of this through many different VHS courses, in many different disciplines.”

Marilyn Dewar

VHS Site Coordinator

Millis High School, Massachusetts

THE FUTURE continued

As research continues to demonstrate the educational benefits of student participation in online courses, the discussion becomes more about quality education and less about technology. The medium is no longer the message when it comes to VHS. The medium is the means by which schools can reach their educational goals; the means by which teachers can focus on individual student learning; the means by which students get excited about learning; the means by which parents are confident that their children are getting the best possible education, regardless of their geographic location.

In the coming year we plan to spread the word about online education and increase awareness and acceptance of it as a viable partner within the education community. VHS member schools are now in 24 states and ten countries (and growing), proving that learning can happen anytime and anywhere.


In the years ahead, global citizenry skills will become increasingly important. The Internet makes it possible to break down geographic barriers to communication, and proliferate cross-border exchange of ideas. Teachers can collaborate nationwide—as well as worldwide—on best practices, and students can explore new subject areas and engage experts (scientists and other professionals as well as other students) in a field through direct communication. The opportunity to be part of a global community of learners is a precious gift right now, but we may find in the future that it is a necessity. VHS is leading the way.

02

“Students nowadays live and play in Internet time, with access to resources any time, any place. Now they can learn in Internet time too.”

Liz Pape, VHS CEO





**“Thank you for helping me
with my dream.”**

VHS Student

VHS, Inc. is audited annually by an independent auditor. The audit report is mailed to Board Members and made available to others. If you would like a copy of the audit report by Greenberg, Rosenblatt, Kull & Bitsoli, P.C., please write or call:

**Liz Pape, Treasurer
VHS, Inc.
3 Clock Tower Place
Suite 100A
Maynard, Massachusetts
01754**

**You can also download our annual report
at our website: www.goVHS.org**

**TELEPHONE
978-897-1900**

**FAX
978-897-9839**



Virtual High School

3 Clock Tower Place, Suite 100A

Maynard, MA 01754

Phone: (978) 897-1900

Fax: (978) 897-9839

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Where we lead, others follow.