



## In This Issue

- Welcome
- A Word on Course Content
- Going the Distance
- Advice to Parents From a Mentor
- What a Parent Can Do
- Technical Support

## Contact Us

<http://www.virtualvirginia.org>



### ***E-mail Communication with Instructors***

Parents: Our Virtual Virginia instructors want to hear from you! When your child's school registered for a Virtual Virginia course we asked for parent e-mail contact information. In many cases, this information was not submitted. If you would like to communicate with your child's instructor via e-mail please send them an e-mail from the account you would like to use. If you are using a work e-mail, please make a statement in your e-mail to the instructor that you understand confidential information may be included in the messages from the instructor. Our instructor e-mail contacts are located on our website [http://www.virtualvirginia.org/about/instructional\\_staff.shtml](http://www.virtualvirginia.org/about/instructional_staff.shtml)

## Welcome

Welcome to Virtual Virginia and the world of online learning. Students in over 250 middle and high schools in Virginia as well as several states and other countries are taking courses through Virtual Virginia. Students take courses online because the class may not be available locally or it conflicts with their schedule. Virtual Virginia offers a rich learning environment with **real** teachers who are highly qualified in the content area and in the techniques of distance learning. Online instructors have many ways to interact with students including e-mail, instant messaging, discussion boards and phone. Virtual Virginia instructors are always pleased to talk with parents and you are encouraged to call your child's teacher to discuss his/her progress in the class.

Your child's academic success is very important to us at Virtual Virginia. We want to partner with you in providing opportunities for your child to achieve his/her learning goals.

## A Word on Course Content



Virtual Virginia currently offers 34 courses (22 Advanced Placement Courses, 6 World Language Courses, and 6 Elective Courses) in both full-year and block formats. As a result of the recent course audit conducted by the College Board, all of our Advanced Placement courses have received their authorization. The College Board Audit Ledger can be found at:

[http://www.collegeboard.com/apcourseledger/home\\_page.html](http://www.collegeboard.com/apcourseledger/home_page.html).  
When searching for Virtual Virginia courses, type "Virtual Virginia" in the field to view our list of approved courses.

Our goal is not only to meet national and state standards but to exceed them. In this effort, Virtual Virginia currently has 15 content development teams revising and developing curriculum. The teams are made up of educators, subject matter experts, and instructional designers. Together, they write lessons, create engaging learning activities, and design assessments for our online environment. This ongoing process allows for constant review and revision of our courses to achieve excellence.

*A mentor is responsible for the following:*

- *Maintain regular contact with students taking online classes outside of the classroom setting.*
- *Monitor student's progress and needs through daily contact with students taking online courses.*
- *Monitor classroom activities and progress of students taking online classes within the school.*
- *Serve as liaison between the student, the school, and Virtual Virginia instructors and supervisors regarding student performance and progress.*
- *Proctor tests and examinations on school grounds.*
- *Collect student forms required by Virtual Virginia.*
- *Work with the local technology staff to ensure that all students have access to the appropriate technology.*
- *Retrieve and provide the school with student grades on locally designated dates. Grades are obtained through the online grade book.*
- *Notify guidance immediately of any student's intent to withdraw from Virtual Virginia courses. Withdrawals must occur within 21 calendar days of the start of the course to avoid the administrative fee. Students must continue to submit work until withdrawal is processed or the grade may be negatively affected.*

*Advice to Parents From a Mentor, interview with Ms. Bobbie McElfish, North Stafford High School*

Expanded course offerings are already in development for the 2008-2009 school year. The new course catalog will be available on our website in January 2008. Feel free to contact Mitzi Fehl, the E-Learning Curriculum Supervisor, at [mitzi.fehl@virtualvirginia.org](mailto:mitzi.fehl@virtualvirginia.org) for any questions regarding our courses, textbooks, or resources.

---

## Going the Distance

How do Virtual Virginia teachers reach out to students across the state to deliver quality instruction? A number of tools are available to help teachers make "distance education" not so distant. Each Virtual Virginia teacher has a toll-free telephone line to use for communicating with students and schools. Within our course software, teachers and students have e-mail accounts and access to an instant messaging system for "real time" communication. Discussion areas allow students and teachers to share thoughts regarding thought-provoking topics. Another important "real time" tool used by Virtual Virginia teachers is Elluminate Live. Elluminate allows students to meet online with their teachers for "real time" instruction. Using computers with microphones, students can ask questions and receive answers. Teachers can share any file that they have on their computer with the students, and can demonstrate concepts on a white board area on the screen. These "live" sessions can be recorded for students to review at a later time. Using these tools, talented Virtual Virginia teachers are able to effectively reach out to students throughout the Commonwealth.

---

## Advice to Parents From a Mentor

### What does a Virtual Virginia "Mentor" do?

Each Virtual Virginia student is assigned a mentor during registration. This person is a responsible adult employed by the school who supports our online learners by acting as a liaison between the student, online instructor, and other stakeholders. Teachers, librarians, paraprofessionals, distance education coordinators, and other educators may perform this role in a school setting. Home school parents typically act as mentors for their students.

### Perspective of a Model Mentor

Bobbie McElfish serves as the Focus/Gifted and Accelerated Programs teacher at North Stafford High School and is one of our mentors. She works with 42 Virtual Virginia students who are engaged in a wide variety of courses. We asked Ms. McElfish to share some of her thoughts about being a mentor.

### What are the ways you support your Virtual Virginia students?

"I think that the most important way to support students who are taking virtual classes is to provide an environment that is friendly and supportive, flexible, and furnished with the proper equipment. One must be friendly and supportive of the students' efforts because for



*What a Parent Can Do* article provided by Ms. Bobbie McElfish, North Stafford High School

### ***Speak Up –***

#### ***Parent Input Requested***

Speak Up is an annual national research project, facilitated by Project Tomorrow, which collects stakeholder views about key educational topics. Survey results are shared with participating school communities.

Virtual Virginia encourages our parents to take this survey. The survey is open until December 21, 2007 and is available at [www.netdayspeakup.org](http://www.netdayspeakup.org).

We encourage parents to take the survey and ask that they answer the questions as they relate to the courses offered through Virtual Virginia (not their “bricks and mortar” school). The information that you provide will be helpful in planning for the future.

many of them, this is their first experience in taking an online course, much less an Advanced Placement online course. Flexibility is important since much of the work must be done using a computer with a long-distance teacher. The students receive training in calling, e-mailing, and paging their teacher if there is a problem or they don't understand something in the module, so support at the school level is imperative for their success. The students need instant access to phones, fax, and, of course, a working computer for the entire block, and they need to be able to schedule the class into an open block in THEIR schedule. For that reason, I choose not to have a planning period because that would compromise the times when some students would need to take the virtual class. I am also VERY fortunate to be provided the ideal setup for differentiation of this sort and to have the genuine support of my administrators for what I do.

I record students' grades weekly, conference with them, contact their Virtual Virginia teachers, and contact their parents as needed. If a student is not completing assignments, I check with his/her counselor about any prior issues or discuss time management with the student. Sometimes the virtual instructor and I must get a little creative to work out something so that a student who may have personal or medical issues can be successful in the class. It is truly a joy to work with the Virtual Virginia instructors and administrators. Student success is truly a team effort from all involved in the program.”

---

## What a Parent Can Do

**What are some of the things parents can do to help their online learners succeed?**

- The first thing that parents can do is to provide daily access to a working computer and computer time to complete assignments. This can range from using one's personal computer, a school computer in the library after school, the public library, or in an emergency, a neighbor's computer. If there is no access at home, then the student will need to make arrangements with the mentor or someone at school to utilize school computers daily.
- Parents should check on their child's progress in the virtual class and communicate with the school mentor whenever there are questions. Another resource is the Virtual Virginia instructors, who are very willing to talk with parents. Their phone numbers and e-mail addresses are listed on the site. Many of them schedule evening sessions just to accommodate students' busy work and extracurricular schedules.
- Parents should be aware that Advanced Placement classes require college level work with college level expectations. Just because a student likes to use the computer doesn't qualify him/her as a good candidate for an online class. Students must be highly motivated, good time managers, and fairly tech savvy.

### Exam Dates for Fall Block Classes

Cohort 1	December 17 & 18
Cohort 2	January 8 & 9
Cohort 3	January 15 & 16
Cohort 4	January 22 & 23

### Spring Block Start Dates

Cohort 5	January 7
Cohort 6	January 14
Cohort 7	January 22
Cohort 8	January 28

(Please note that full-year classes observe winter break December 21 - January 2)



- Parents can check on their child's progress in a variety of ways. The simplest way is to have your child show you how they access their assignments, give you their password, and check interims and report cards. Since Virtual Virginia's grades are cumulative, I print out my students' grades from the Virtual Virginia site and give a copy to the students to take home (instead of recording the grade on the report card) and get signed. This procedure seems to work better for me because the parents can see exactly which assignments have not been completed, test scores, etc. Students may "trade-in" their grade sheets any time that they have made positive changes in their assignments for an updated version to show their parents.

---

## Technical Support

### When Questions Arise, Virtual Virginia Support Is There to Assist!

Virtual Virginia provides Help Desk support to students, mentors, teachers, parents, and other school personnel Monday through Friday from 8:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. via e-mail ([support@virtualhelpdesk.org](mailto:support@virtualhelpdesk.org)) or phone (866.650.0027). Help Desk Technicians are available to help with the Virtual Virginia Course Management tool (D2L), or other Virtual Virginia course resources like Elluminate.

When calling or e-mailing the help desk, please have the following information ready:

Course Name  
Username  
Nature of Problem  
Description of Problem or Request  
Error Message (if applicable)  
A screen shot of the issue (if applicable)

This information allows technicians to quickly identify the issue and seek a resolution. Further information, including Frequently Asked Questions and system requirements, can be found on the Virtual Virginia website at <http://www.virtualvirginia.org/techassistance/index.shtml>, or by contacting the Virtual Virginia Help Desk. "See" you online!