

Build it and they will come: How LCPS offers online education statewide



If necessity is the mother of invention, the pandemic of our generation has created several innovative avenues in the way of education. None has had more of an impact than the evolution of virtual school, and a new consortium that includes Las Cruces Public Schools is creating a hub for learning that is accessible to more than just students in Las Cruces.

The New Mexico Virtual Course Consortium (NMVC²) is a network of public school districts and charter schools under the guidance of the New Mexico Public Education Department to provide high quality, standards-aligned supplemental online courses for subject areas that might be difficult to staff

locally. For example, a student in Sierra County who would like to take an AP English class can enroll with LCPS and get that instruction online while staying enrolled in their home district.

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Opportunities like that are currently made possible because districts across the state have made themselves available to host any student whose circumstances cannot be accommodated by their district school. In LCPS, we offer K-12 courses through our OWL (Online With LCPS) program, an extension of the Virtual Learning Academy (VLA) under my direction along with Stephanie Hanway, who is the principal of VLA. In all, LCPS joins six other districts in the NMVC²: the Pecos Cyber Academy, Cuba Public schools, TriStar Academy in Santa Rosa, Fort Sumner, and Vaughn, the School of Dreams Academy in Los Lunas, Taos Municipal Schools and the Taos Academy Charter School. The consortium can provide up to four virtual courses per student, either as a supplement to their current course of study, or as an online substitute for classes that their home school currently does not offer. Right now, students cannot enroll full-time with the consortium, but it is open to homeschooled students looking for enriched learning opportunities outside of their homeschool curriculum.

As a parent, taxpayer or educator, an obvious question after learning about the consortium is how can all this be possible if the state funds a district according to enrollment? If you look at education as a business and districts as providers of a service, then the service is instruction, and the cost is a pass-through between districts under a memorandum of understanding. Using the previous example, our student in Sierra County is funded by the state and those monies are paid to the home district where the student resides. The home district would then reimburse LCPS using set rates.

Consortium fees are \$375 per semester, per course in middle school and high school. For elementary students, those fees are \$700 per year or \$375 per semester. Fees are set by the consortium and help to cover administrative costs.

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As the consortium continues to gain traction, we hope additional districts will find value in offering this unique opportunity to provide additional course resources to their students. Any state-authorized district that can offer standards-based curriculum can become a member.

As we continue to redefine education in a virtual setting, the consortium, and the opportunities it provides, is creating a foundation for student success no matter where you live. For more information on how to join, please visit the New Mexico Virtual Course Consortium's website at <https://webnew.ped.state.nm.us/new-mexico-virtual-course-consortium/>.

Criss Grubbs is the Executive Director of Virtual Teaching and Learning at Las Cruces Public Schools.

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