



Meridian Public Schools **Virtual Learning Academy**

The Meridian Public Schools Virtual Learning Academy affords your student the opportunity to learn anytime, anywhere through the use of online courses supported by highly-qualified, Michigan-certified teachers. Complete your schooling at home tuition-free, while maintaining the benefits of enrollment as a Meridian Public Schools student.

INTRODUCTION

We know that every child learns differently, and you know your child best. Meridian Public Schools understands that educational options must be flexible to meet your child's needs. The way education must operate looks and feels different than before COVID-19. Partnering with Meridian Public Schools Virtual Academy will ensure that your child receives the benefits of a Meridian education, support, and technology, with the flexibility of learning from the comfort and safety of your home.

This Guide has been prepared by Meridian Public Schools with support from resources provided by *Michigan Virtual* and *National Standards for Quality Online Programs (2019)*. It is intended to walk families and students through the necessary steps and resources to help you make the best decision for you.

ESSENTIAL COMPONENTS TO THIS GUIDE

- [Making the decision to select online learning](#)
- [Online learning enrollment process](#)
- [Supports](#)

WHY CHOOSE ONLINE LEARNING?

Students and their families choose learning online for a variety of reasons. The *Foundation for Blended and Online Learning* (2017) published a report on why students choose blended and online schools. The report authors used surveys, focus groups, and interviews with students, along with other data to create the report. The report identified three broad reasons students pursue online and blended learning:

- academics;
- social-emotional health and safety; and
- interests and life circumstances

Most recently, families have also expressed concerns regarding

- COVID-19 safety and requirements

As a MERPS Virtual Academy learner, students may be enrolled as full-time learners – taking all of their courses virtually.

ASSESSING STUDENT READINESS FOR ONLINE LEARNING:

Learning online is different and takes some additional skills, but virtual courses are just as important as any other course. Your online course grades are part of your permanent school record. Talk with your parents or guardian and guidance counselor about why you are interested in online learning.

Not all students are well prepared for online learning. Use this one-page rubric created by *Michigan Virtual* to help you understand what is required of a successful online learner:

Online Learner Readiness Rubric. Be honest and identify those areas you think could be a problem. The rubric asks you to evaluate your basic skills and competencies in the following areas:

- Technology Skills
- Work & Study Habits
- Learning Style
- Technology/Connectivity
- Time Management
- Interest/Motivation
- Reading/Writing Skills
- Support Services

Strategies for Online Success is an orientation to learning online aimed at preparing students for the transition from taking courses in-person to taking them online. It consists of three modules that include interactive components, such as videos, self-checks, and resources you can download:

- Online Learning Basics
- Skills for Online Learning
- Online Learning Technology

All MERPS Virtual Academy learners must complete this course as a part of MERPS orientation.

Profile of a Successful Online Learner*

Instructors with years of online teaching experience agree that students who have a successful, satisfying experience learning online share several critical characteristics. Review these characteristics and answer these questions.

- **Good Time Management:** Can you create and maintain a study schedule throughout the semester without face-to-face interaction with a teacher?
- **Effective Communication:** Can you ask for help, make contact with other students and the instructor online, and describe any problems you have with learning materials using email, text messaging, and/or the telephone?
- **Independent Study Habits:** Can you study and complete assignments without direct supervision and maintain the self-discipline to stick to a schedule?
- **Self-Motivation:** Do you have a strong desire to learn skills, acquire knowledge, and fulfill assignments in online courses because of an educational goal? Can you maintain focus on **that goal**?
- **Academic Readiness:** Do you have the basic reading, writing, math, and computer literacy skills to succeed in the class?
- **Technologically Prepared:** Are you prepared to use constantly evolving technology to learn? The International Society for Technology in Education (ISTE) published a set of

Standards for Students designed to empower student voice and ensure that learning is a student-driven process.

A Special Note About Time Commitment

Time management is one of the skills most critical to success. Students who cannot manage time and assignments without direct supervision usually struggle to be successful learners online. Students should expect and be able to spend five to 10 hours a week per course.

*Michigan Virtual High School. (n.d.). *Student Guide to Online Learning*. <https://michiganvirtual.org/resources/guides/student-guide/>

CONSIDERATIONS BEFORE YOU DECIDE

The decision to enroll in virtual learning academy is an important one. The classes, learning, and grade your child receives will go on their permanent record, just like in the traditional classroom.

Student Related

- Review CDC School Decision-Making Tool for families [here](#).
- Consider how 1-2 hours a day per course will be balanced with your student's other commitments and life in general.
- Let your student choose the specific online course(s) whenever possible. Attention to a student's motivation for enrolling in an online course can go a long way toward eventual success.
- Discuss academic records, rubric results, and enrollment decisions with your student and school.
- Consider where your student will be working — in a designated space at school (classroom or lab, for instance) or outside class hours at home or another location.
- Consider how many online courses your student will take. If attending a full-time online cyber school or participating in a seat time waiver program, the school is required to provide a computer and Internet access.

SUPPORTS AVAILABLE TO LEARNERS

Unlike a traditional on campus student, virtual learners are responsible for creating their own learning environment at home. It is important to understand what tools, resources, and support is available to create a successful online learning environment:

Personal Learning Coach:

Meridian Public Schools professional staff will be connected with each family to ensure your child has access to the needed technology and resources. This individual will be your direct connection to learning and ensure that your family has the tools and support needed to be successful.

Academic Support and Tutoring:

Access to a highly-qualified teacher is available via our MERPS Instant Teacher during available hours via Zoom or call in. Face to face instructional support will be available via our Academic Drop In Center:

Grades 9-12th Drop In Center: Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays from 3:10PM-4:30PM @MECHS Commons

Technology Help Desk:

Technology support is available by emailing help@merps.org or calling 989.488.4662

Technology:

Students are provided with the required personal device (chromebook, laptop, etc) and any needed tools essential for learning. Hotspot scholarships are available for families in need. This information is collected during student registration in Skyward. We understand that circumstances change, if your family needs assistance, please contact the building office.

Edgenuity requires a 4 Mbps or greater connection.

Courses:

Virtual courses will align with the core courses at MERPS. Depending on the enrollment numbers, courses will be a combination of MERPS courses and vendor courses. MERPS vendor partners include:

K-8: Accelerate Education found [HERE](#).

9-12: Edgenuity. Available Edgenuity courses can be found [HERE](#).

ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS TO ENROLL:

Meridian Public Schools is excited to enroll students who meet the following requirements:

1. Currently reside within the State of Michigan, and
2. Your child must be 5 years of age by September 1 of the upcoming school year, OR
3. Your child must be less than 20 years of age on September 1 of the upcoming school year, and not have a GED or earned a high school diploma.

ENROLLMENT PROCESS:

1. Review [CDC decision making tool](#), [Online Learner Readiness Rubric](#) and [Virtual Academy Handbook](#)

2. If interested in enrollment as a Virtual Academy student, please complete MERPS Virtual Learning Application [HERE](#).
3. MERPS Staff will alert family once application has been processed and to schedule orientation, construct student course schedule, and to arrange for technology pick up:
 - a. Students in grades 5-12 will complete ["Strategies for Online Success"](#) PRIOR to beginning classes
 - b. Complete your scheduled Virtual Academy orientation
 - c. Completion of [Student/family interview](#) for online learning form
 - d. [Online learning agreement](#)
4. Completion of the Meridian Public Schools registration paperwork via Skyward.
5. Get ready for a great year! Classes begin on Monday, August 31.

ENROLLMENT DEADLINES:

SEMESTER 1:

Class Start	Class End	Enrollment Drop/Add End Date
August 31, 2020	January 21, 2021	September 18, 2020

SEMESTER 2:

Class Start	Class End	Enrollment Drop/Add End Date
January 25, 2021	May 27, 2021	February 5, 2021

COST:

Enrollment in Meridian Virtual Academy is tuition-free to all students who are residents of the state of Michigan.

ACADEMIC SUPPORT:

Access to a highly-qualified teacher is available via our MERPS Instant Teacher during available hours via Zoom or Call In. Face to face instructional support will be available via our Academic Drop In Center.

MERIDIAN PUBLIC SCHOOLS = OPPORTUNITIES:

A MERPS Virtual Academy student IS a Meridian Public Schools student, just choosing to learn in a different environment. As a result, your child is able to secure the same benefits of a student enrolled in our traditional on-campus courses. Please review the answers to common questions below:

Athletics, Clubs, and Activities:

YES! Full-time virtual students are able to participate in school related athletics. They must meet MHSAA academic requirements.

All MERPS virtual students are eligible to participate in Meridian Public Schools clubs and activities. From clubs like robotics and drama, to social activities such as prom, Meridian Public Schools offers clubs, activities, and events to meet the individual interest of every student!

Check your student email for available opportunities, as they change regularly. You can also visit [HERE](#) to learn more about the current clubs and activities available to 9-12th grade students.

[MECHS 9-12th Grade Clubs/Activities](#)

Diploma:

YES! Once a Virtual Academy student has met the requirements for graduation, they are able to participate in MECHS commencement and receive a diploma from Meridian Public Schools!

Dual Enrollment:

YES! Virtual Academy students are eligible to participate in dual enrollment through our college partner, Delta College. Please alert your Academic Advisor of interest in participating in dual enrollment. They will be able to support your dual enrollment efforts.

CALENDAR

Virtual Academy learners follow the Meridian Public Schools Calendar. You can view the District Calendar [HERE](#).

Enrollment Dates:

SEMESTER 1:

Class Start	Class End	Enrollment Drop/Add End Date
August 31, 2020	January 15, 2021	September 18, 2020

SEMESTER 2:

Class Start	Class End	Enrollment Drop/Add End Date
January 25, 2021	May, 27 2021	February 5, 2021

COURSES & CURRICULUM

Virtual courses will align with the core courses at MERPS. Depending on the enrollment numbers, courses will be a combination of MERPS courses and vendor courses. MERPS Virtual Learning Academy has partnered with Edgenuity to provide high-quality education to create a flexible, individualized curriculum for each learner in grades 6-12th. Through this programming, learning is customized to ensure your child has the personalized education and engagement they need to be successful. Courses include core academic courses in the areas of english, mathematics, social studies, and science, as well as a significant number of electives to support opportunities for each student. Visit [HERE](#) for a list of available courses.

COURSE MATERIALS & SUPPLIES

All course material and needed supplies will be provided by Meridian Virtual Learning Academy. Learners will receive a chromebook and access to MERPS Virtual Learning curriculum at no cost.

COMMUNICATION

Families can expect at least weekly two-way communication from their Meridian Public Schools Advocate. Parents/Guardians often serve as the main point of contact for students in grades K-8, whereas often the Personal Learning Coach and Teacher connects directly with the student in grades 9-12th. Email and a new will be our primary form of communication with families and provides text messaging options.

K-8th grade families will receive weekly email updates and weekly two-way communication by MERPS staff in addition to the weekly communication done by a Meridian Public Schools Personal Learning Coach.

9-12th grade families will receive email updates through Edgenuity and from their Meridian Public Schools Personal Learning Coach.

GRADING AND TRANSCRIPTS

Grading scales align with Meridian Public Schools grading system. You can access these by visiting the corresponding grade:

[Elementary \(K-4\)](#)

PARENT/FAMILY EXPECTATIONS:

Parents are an integral partner in the team that can affect student success even though their responsibilities may be a little different in online courses. **Recent research** (Borup, et al., 2017) involving interviews with online teachers and school-based mentors found that teachers and mentors believed that students would most likely succeed in online courses when parents/guardians:

1. Advised students on their course enrollments;
2. Monitored student performance and progress;
3. Motivated students to more fully engage in learning activities;
4. Organized and managed student learning at home; and
5. Assisted students as they worked on assignments

The same research suggests that online programs might see an increase in parental engagement by:

1. Involving parents/guardians in online course enrollment decisions;
2. Educating parents/guardians about learning online and how they can support their students;
3. Maintaining regular contact with parents/guardians by inviting them to be involved in specific ways; and
4. Assisting parents/guardians in keeping up on their students' academic performance by regularly providing student progress reports and offering an online parent portal, so they can easily track student engagement and performance.

How to support your child's success online:

To support a successful online learning experience, parents/families should complete the following before class starts and until the course is completed:

- Reinforce that online courses are as important as face-to-face courses.
- Help your student establish and maintain a regular schedule for working on his/her virtual course daily.
- Review the syllabus with your student and define expectations.
- Agree on incentives and consequences.
- Set up a study space, including the technology required, and be prepared to resolve technical issues that may come up.

- Monitor your student's progress weekly.

How to monitor your child's progress online:

MERPS encourages you to take an active role in your student's learning experience.

6th-12th grade Families:

To help you, we offer access to Edgenuity family portal so you can monitor your child's progress at any time, as well as receive regular progress reports sent directly to your email account. To access the family portal:

1	Visit: https://auth.edgenuity.com/Login/Login/Family
2	Enter email address AND activation code If you need assistance, please email help@merps.org or call 989.488.4662.

Reading and Understanding Family Portal Progress Reports:

6th-12th Grade Families:

Instructions to read and understand your child's progress reports can be found by visiting [HERE](#).

STUDENT EXPECTATIONS:

Student Checklist

- The student has the basic computer skills needed to navigate the course and complete and submit assignments.
- The student has sufficient time in his/her schedule and understands that online courses often take as much or more time than face-to-face courses.
- The course fits in the student's academic plan and the student needs the credits.
- The student knows the course grade will become part of the academic record.
- The student has a place to work and the technology needed to submit assignments.
- The school provides a mentor or another adult to support the student's online learning and the student knows who the mentor is and how to contact him/her.
- The student knows the importance of the course syllabus and the start and end dates of the course.
- The student is able to ask for help from the online instructor and respond to the instructor via email, text, phone, or in person.
- The student has support for her or his IEP.

- You and the student know where to go for help and who can resolve technical issues.

6th-12th Grade:

Visit [HERE](#) for more information surrounding Edgenuity FAQs.

Student Assessments:

Assessments are an integral part of instruction, as they provide critical information regarding both learning and understanding. Meridian Public Schools utilizes several different assessment tools to determine if instructional goals are being met to address any additional learning needs your child might have. In all three learning options, students will engage in the building specific assessments to provide individualized instruction to students. These tools vary by building, but include both formative and summative assessments:

MECHS 9-12th Grade Students

All MECHS students, face to face, Virtual Academy, and hybrid, will engage in the following assessments:

- ❖ NWEA MAP Growth: All learners, grades 9-11th will take this assessment in the Fall, Winter, and Summer. Virtual option is available to off-campus learners
- ❖ ACCUPLACER: 10th, 11th & 12th graders staying for the 5th year and who have not yet achieved qualifying scores in reading, writing and math for Delta College will take the ACCUPLACER on either Tuesday, February 2nd or Wednesday, February 3rd (tentative dates yet to be confirmed). Virtual options **may** be available on a limited basis depending on the situation. Contact amy.boxey@merps.org for more information.

MJHS 5th - 8th Grade Students

All MJHS students, face to face and Virtual Academy will engage in the following assessments:

- ❖ AIMSweb Math and Reading: All learners will take this assessment in the Fall, Winter, and Spring. Virtual option available to off-campus students.

All MERPS Virtual Learning Academy students, regardless of their enrollment choice, will complete state required assessments, including MSTEP, PSAT, SAT, etc. Testing options will depend on state requirements (i.e. ability to test remote, etc). At this time, state and national tests are required to be taken in a school setting.

MERPS Virtual Learning Academy Questions

What is the link to register my child for the MERPS Virtual Academy Learning?

- ❖ <https://tinyurl.com/merpsvirtuelschool>

Is there a deadline to register?

- ❖ Yes. MERPS requests families enroll by Friday, August 17th for planning purposes. Enrollment can occur after this date if seats are available. Please contact 989.488.4662 if you need to enroll AFTER August 14th.

When does my decision to enroll become final?

Enrollment drop/add dates are available below. After these deadlines, a change can NOT occur until after the semester ends.

ENROLLMENT TIMELINES for MERPS Virtual Learning Academy 2020-2021

❖ SEMESTER 1:

Class Start	Class End	Enrollment Drop/Add End Date
August 31, 2020	January 22, 2021	September 18, 2020

❖ SEMESTER 2:

Class Start	Class End	Enrollment Drop/Add End Date
January 25, 2021	June 2, 2021	February 5, 2021

If we enroll in the MERPS Virtual Learning Academy, when can we transition back to on campus, face-to-face learning?

- ❖ A semester-long commitment is required to enroll.

Will grades be issued?

- ❖ Yes. Grades will be issued just as they are in the 5-day, face-to-face, on campus school model.
- ❖ Grading scales align with Meridian Public Schools grading system. You can access these by visiting the corresponding grade:
 - [Elementary \(K-4\)](#)
 - [Junior High School](#) (5-8th grade)
 - [Early College High School](#) (9-12th grade)

If we begin the year face-to-face, but would like to move to the MERPS Virtual Learning Academy, when can I do so?

- ❖ Enrollment will follow the timelines in the above chart. Appeals can be made to the corresponding building principal for consideration outside of these timelines. These decisions will occur on an individual, case by case basis.

Do I have to enroll every semester?

- ❖ No, enrollment will continue through the 20-21 school year, unless the family/student requests to be dropped from the program and enrolled in face-to-face learning.

Are supplies provided?

- ❖ Yes! Students are provided with the required personal device (chromebook, laptop, etc) and any needed tools essential for learning.

What about internet access?

- ❖ Access to internet is required for the MERPS Virtual Learning Academy.
- ❖ Edgenuity requires a 4 Mbps or greater connection.
- ❖ Hotspot scholarships are available for families in need. This information is collected during student registration in Skyward. We understand that circumstances change, if your family needs assistance, please contact the building office.

Will my child still have access to school provided meals?

- ❖ Families that qualify for free and reduced lunch will be able to continue receiving breakfast and lunch from Meridian Public Schools. Similar to the spring/summer meal distribution centers, meal pick up will occur at a set time every week for enrolled families. Meals will be distributed every Monday for families that have completed the sign up form **beginning Wednesday, September 2 (Mondays moving forward)**. Please sign up [HERE](#) to participate:

I've enrolled, now what?

ENROLLMENT PROCESS:

1. Review [Online Learner Readiness Rubric](#) and [Virtual Academy Handbook](#)
2. If interested in enrollment as a Virtual Academy student, please complete MERPS Virtual Learning Application [HERE](#).
3. MERPS Staff Advisor will alert family once application has been processed and to schedule orientation, construct student course schedule, and to arrange for technology pick up:
 - a. Students in grades 5-12 will complete ["Strategies for Online Success"](#) PRIOR to beginning classes
 - b. Complete your scheduled Virtual Academy orientation
 - c. Completion of [Student/family interview](#) for online learning form
 - d. [Online learning agreement](#)
 - e. Create a customized course schedule to support individual interest

4. Completion of the Meridian Public Schools registration paperwork.
5. Get ready for a great year! Classes begin on Monday, August 31.

Are Virtual and Hybrid students still eligible for athletics and activities?

YES! As full-time Meridian Public School students, both Virtual Academy and Hybrid students are eligible for athletics and extracurricular activities.

Will courses offered align with current MERPS offerings?

Virtual courses will align with the core courses at MERPS. Depending on the enrollment numbers, courses will be a combination of MERPS courses and vendor courses.

Can students still attend CTE programming (Meridian Public School programs, BAISD, other local Midland County CTE programs)?

- ❖ Yes. When you select virtual programming through Meridian Public Schools, your child is enrolled as a Meridian Public Schools student and is eligible to participate in all programming available to on-campus MERPS students. However, CTE programming is only offered face-to-face. Eligibility follows MECHS established guidelines for enrollment. Questions? Email Amy Boxey at amy.boxey@merps.org

Can Virtual Learning Academy students dual enroll?

- ❖ Yes. When you select virtual programming through Meridian Public Schools, your child is enrolled as a Meridian Public Schools student and is eligible to participate in all programming available to on-campus MERPS students. Eligibility follows MECHS established guidelines for enrollment. Questions? Email Amy Boxey at amy.boxey@merps.org

Can Virtual Learning Academy students still participate in work based learning?

- ❖ When you select virtual programming through Meridian Public Schools, your child is enrolled as a Meridian Public Schools student and is eligible to participate in all programming available to on-campus MERPS students. Eligibility follows MECHS established guidelines for enrollment. Questions? Email Jennifer Nosakowski at jennifer.nosakowski@merps.org

Will Secondary MERPS Virtual Learning Academy students be able to enroll in face-to-face classes?

- ❖ Yes! Students enrolled in MERPS Virtual Learning Academy can also participate in face-to-face on campus **ELECTIVE** courses (both traditional and hybrid), as space in the classroom permits. Families will need to provide their own transportation for students attending in-school courses. Students and families will work with their assigned MERPS Advisor to construct a schedule and can arrange for on campus courses during this time.

- ❖ High School Band will meet face-to-face, on campus from 2:05PM-3:05PM

Will students take assessments, receive feedback on assignments, and take tests?

Assessments are an integral part of instruction, as they provide critical information regarding both learning and understanding. Meridian Public Schools utilizes several different assessment tools to determine if instructional goals are being met to address any additional learning needs your child might have. In all three learning options, students will engage in the building specific assessments to provide individualized instruction to students. These tools vary by building, but include both formative and summative assessments:

MECHS 9-12th Grade Students

All MECHS students, face to face, Virtual Academy, and hybrid, will engage in the following assessments:

- ❖ Retake a quiz or reset an assignment:
 - Email jamie.smith@merps.org OR cindy.wenzlick@merps.org
- ❖ Tests and Exams will be administered in a supervised format utilizing virtual and face to monitoring.:
 - Face to face testing is our preferred method of test proctoring:
 - Learners can attend the Academic Drop In Center on Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday from 3:05-4:30PM.
 - Make an appointment to come in using <https://www.signupgenius.com/go/10c0d4fa4af2da6fdce9-meridian>
 - Virtual testing proctoring will occur via the student's webcam **IF APPROVED BY VIRTUAL COORDINATOR**. Make an appointment [Google Calendar link](#)
 - NWEA MAP Growth: All learners, grades 9-11th will take this assessment in the Fall, Winter, and Summer. A virtual option is available to off-campus learners
- ❖ ACCUPLACER: 10th, 11th & 12th graders staying for the 5th year and who have not yet achieved qualifying scores in reading, writing and math for Delta College will take the ACCUPLACER on either Tuesday, February 2nd or Wednesday, February 3rd (tentative dates yet to be confirmed). Virtual options **may** be available on a limited basis depending on the situation. Contact amy.boxey@merps.org for more information.

All MERPS students, regardless of their enrollment choice, will complete state required assessments, including MSTEP, PSAT, SAT, etc. Testing options will depend on state requirements (i.e. ability to test remote, etc). At this time, state and national tests are required to be taken in a school setting.

Will my student have?	Face-to-Face	Virtual Learning Academy
Instruction from a highly-qualified teacher	X	X
Participate in Athletics, Extracurricular, and	X	X

School Activities		
Devices(laptop, etc)/Headphones/Supplies	X	X
Meals*	X	X *Free & Reduced lunch ONLY
Academic Support: Teacher-Led	X	x
Speech and Other Ancillary Services	X	X
Daily Set Schedule	X	
Transportation	X	
Teacher-Led Instruction	X	
Accommodations (IEP/504)	X	X
Hands On Learning	X	
Option to take elective courses (5-12) Band, Art, PE, etc	X	X

RESOURCES

Calendar

Virtual Academy Enrollment Form

- Readiness Checklist
- "I Can" Checklist

Strategies for Online Success Courses

MECHS Clubs/Activities

Mentor Support

Technology Support

REFERENCES

Michigan Virtual High School. (2020). *Strategies for Online Success*. Retrieved from: <https://michiganvirtual.org/resources/sos/>

National Standard for Quality Online Programs. (2019). Retrieved from: <https://www.nsqol.org/the-standards/>