



Massachusetts has two fully online schools and a few supplemental options for students.

In SY 2013–14, 7,100 students took a class through The Virtual High School (VHS), an estimated 2.5% of the state's high school population and a 26% increase over the prior year (VHS is located in Massachusetts). “An Act Establishing Commonwealth Virtual Schools” (H4274/Chapter 379²⁷⁷) was approved by the legislature in January 2013, providing a new framework for online and supplemental K–12 educational opportunities for students.

Chapter 379 built on previous legislation that opened the door for virtual schools in Massachusetts. It defined “Commonwealth virtual school” as a public school operated by a board of trustees whose teachers primarily teach from a remote location using the Internet or other computer-based methods, and whose students are not required to be located at the physical premises of the school. It stated that:²⁷⁸

- A single school district, two or more school districts, an education collaborative, an institution of higher education, a non-profit entity, two or more certified teachers, or parents are eligible to submit proposals for a Commonwealth of Massachusetts Virtual School (CMVS). Private and parochial schools and for-profit entities are not eligible. CMVS are approved for three to five years.
- The board may authorize no more than three CMVS for the 2013–16 school years, three more CMVS for the 2016–19 school years, and four additional CMVS for SY 2019–20.

²⁷⁷ Commonwealth Virtual Schools were created by Chapter 379 (2013); retrieved June 26, 2014; <https://malegislature.gov/Laws/SessionLaws/Acts/2012/Chapter379>. They are governed by Chapter 71, Section 94; <https://malegislature.gov/Laws/GeneralLaws/PartI/TitleXII/Chapter71/Section94> and Board Regulations, <http://www.doe.mass.edu/lawsregs/603cmr52.html>

²⁷⁸ Virtual Schools: Report on New Legislation and Proposed Delegation of Authority to Commissioner; retrieved July 3, 2014; <http://www.doe.mass.edu/boe/docs/2013-01/item4.html>

- No more than 2% (roughly 19,000) of students enrolled in public schools statewide may be enrolled full time in virtual schools, and at least 5% of the students enrolled in a CMVS must come from the sponsoring district or collaborative.
- A school committee (district school board) may vote to restrict enrollment of its students in CMVS if its total student enrollment in virtual schools exceeds 1% of the district's student population.

Details about reporting requirements for CMVS can be found on the department of elementary and secondary education (ESE) website.²⁷⁹ Specifically, each CMVS is required to submit an annual report to the ESE (the first report will be delivered in January 2015). In addition, the ESE must publish annual reports on CMVS covering academic performance and demographic data, and must report to the legislature on implementation and impact of the CMVS regulations. The first accountability report is set to be released in early fall 2014,²⁸⁰ and focuses on the Greenfield Virtual School because it was the only school operating in SY 2013–14. In July 2014, the ESE published regulations offering detailed guidance to virtual schools regarding the application process, student enrollment, financial management, timelines, and reporting.²⁸¹

Chapter 379 also required the ESE develop and publish a list of online courses aligned with current state academic standards that school districts may use. It published the rubric to be used for approval and identified free courses that meet the standards in the rubric, but no providers have yet applied for that approval as of July 2014. School districts are not required to use approved courses.

Two virtual schools are authorized to operate in SY 2014–15 as CMVS. Massachusetts Virtual Academy (MAVA) was established in 2010 as a Virtual Innovation School (603 CMR 48.05),²⁸² a non-charter district school with more autonomy than a traditional public school, becoming the state's first fully online school. With Chapter 379, MAVA was required to apply to become a CMVS, and it was approved as the Greenfield Virtual School in July 2013. The school served 454 students in grades K–12 in SY 2013–14 (under a cap of 750, 250 of whom could be high school students).²⁸³ This was a decrease of 5% from SY 2012–13. The enrollment cap increased to 1,000 students for SY 2014–15 and will increase to 1,250 for SY 2015–16. While future CMVS will require that 5% of students be local, MAVA is grandfathered in at 2%.

TEC Connections Academy (TECCA) was approved to serve K–12 students statewide beginning in school year 2014–15; it is initially approved for three years.²⁸⁴ The school may serve up to 1,000 students in its first year, 1,500 the second, and 2,000 in its third. The school is sponsored by The Educational Collaborative (TEC), which was formed in 1980 by suburban Boston school districts. It launched TEC Online Academy in 2009, which offers a catalog of over 40 online courses, serving 354 supplemental course enrollments in SY 2013–14 in 16 member districts and other Commonwealth districts funded via a student fee typically paid by the sending district.

According to Chapter 379, the cost for students attending a CMVS is set at the “school choice tuition amount” (up to \$5,000), although ESE may approve alternate amounts within limits. Both MAVA and TECCA are funded at \$6,700 per student. The CMVS approval process required schools that wished to open for SY 2015–16 to submit an initial application by July 1, 2014; no schools applied.

In July 2013 the state closed MassONE, a state program to provide tools and resources to educators.

²⁷⁹ ESE Reporting Requirements and Ongoing Review, 603 CMR 52.08; retrieved August 1, 2014; <http://www.doe.mass.edu/lawsregs/603cmr52.html?section=08>

²⁸⁰ The ESE report on CMVS will be available in fall 2014 at; <http://www.doe.mass.edu/od/cmvs/>. The 2012–13 Digital Learning in Massachusetts report can be found at <http://www.doe.mass.edu/od/etreport/2012.pdf>.

²⁸¹ 603 CMR 52.00 Virtual School Regulations; retrieved July 31, 2014; <http://www.doe.mass.edu/lawsregs/603cmr52.html>

²⁸² Innovation Schools Statute: Mass. General Laws Chapter 71, Section 92 (as added by Section 8 of Chapter 12 of the Acts of 2010); retrieved June 26, 2014; <https://malegislature.gov/Laws/GeneralLaws/PartI/TitleXII/Chapter71/Section92>

²⁸³ Massachusetts Virtual Academy at Greenfield Commonwealth Virtual School (39010900) Enrollment Data; retrieved June 26, 2014; <http://profiles.doe.mass.edu/profiles/student.aspx?orgcode=39010900&orgtypecode=6&>

²⁸⁴ State board of education February 2014 Meeting Minutes; retrieved June 26, 2014; http://www.doe.mass.edu/boe/minutes/14/0225reg_0224spec.pdf