

Virtual high school expands students' opportunities



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Charri Garcia, 18, finishes homework on her laptop while holding her 4-month-old son Carlos Zaragoza Monday. Garcia, like many students enrolled in the virtual high school iSucceed, faces unique challenges that would make traditional schooling difficult. Through the online academy, Garcia can complete high school from home.
Mike Vogt/IPT

iSucceed Virtual High School offers them opportunities they didn't have in traditional public schools.

Students who attend iSucceed take classes when they choose and use a computer and an Internet connection to do so.

Forest Gerlach, 15, of Kuna, says he likes the flexible schedule and the online teachers are helpful.

Gerlach, an iSucceed sophomore, said he had a bad experience in a traditional public school.

"Other students weren't very nice, and I was kind of like the outcast there," he said.

Gerlach attended a Kuna charter school from 7th to 9th grade, but the school wasn't able to offer 10th grade the following year. That's when he enrolled with iSucceed.

"I really like it," he added. "Most of it is very flexible, and the teachers are really good."

As a virtual academy senior, Alyssia Quallio, said she learns better by being away from high school drama and taking classes online.

iSucceed also allows the 18-year-old to focus on activities outside high school, such as working and participating in pageants. Quallio earned the title of 2008-2009 Miss Teen Meridian, among many others in recent years.

Quallio said going to school online allows her to spend more time out in the community advocating for things she believes in.

Many students who attend the virtual academy often have challenges, such as illnesses or learning disabilities, that make an online school more accommodating to their needs.

Charri Garcia is an 18-year-old iSucceed senior and a mother. Garcia said when she had her baby four months ago, she wanted to stay home with him and chose to earn her high school diploma online.

She says she misses her friends and having her teachers close by.

“But the teachers here are great too,” she said, “There’s a lot of support to make sure you succeed.”

iSucceed director says school meets needs

Cliff Green, executive director of iSucceed Virtual High School, says his job is to listen to parents and students and provide the best he can for their educational needs.

iSucceed by the numbers

330 — current enrollment

500 — projected spring enrollment

120 — courses offered, from basic math to Mandarin Chinese and Latin

365 — days of the year online tutors are available

19 — number of part-time, state-certified teachers

3 — iMentors who monitor students’ progress and regularly communicate with parents and students

Fast facts about iSucceed Virtual High School

- iSucceed is a tuition-free, full-time, diploma-granting online high school
- It opened Sept. 2 and its central office is located in Boise
- A group of local community members started the school
- The school provides a free laptop, printer and Internet reimbursement for enrolled students
- iSucceed virtual classrooms allow interaction between students and the teacher, monitored chat rooms
- The school is open for parents to be involved with their students through online access to monitor activity, frequent online and hard copy report cards
- Students can earn college credits for free through Axia virtual college
- Students can still participate in sports programs offered at other schools
- iSucceed even hosts social events, including prom and graduation ceremony

- For more information visit www.isucceedvhs.net.

“I may not be able to fix every problem we have, but I’m going to listen to you, and if we can get it done, we will get it done,” Green said.

Often, students choose iSucceed because of other life factors that make traditional schooling a challenge. Green said one student has cancer of the knee and wouldn’t be able to attend a regular public high school right now. Many more students suffer from illnesses or learning disabilities.

“We get a lot of kids that are bullied,” he said.

Melissa McGrath, spokeswoman for the State Department of Education, said iSucceed is one of only two virtual charter schools in Idaho that specifically targets at-risk youth.

“iSucceed has a very innovative program,” she said. “It’s one of those second generation charter schools that are cropping up in Idaho that serves students with special needs.”

The other virtual academy, Richard McKenna Charter High School, is based in Mountain Home.

Parents see progress

Gerlach’s mother, Sandra, said she was thrilled with the virtual education her son receives.

“They have high standards and push kids to succeed,” she said. “And if there’s something we can’t figure out in five minutes, we’re encouraged to call the iMentor.”

School officials say iSucceed’s “iMentor” program is a unique offering in the online education world. The program is a comprehensive approach to ensure that students get the support they need. In addition to the iMentor program, students have 24-hour technical and tutoring support available to them, on-demand seven days a week.

Green said iSucceed allows an alternative for teachers, too. Some of the part-time teachers that work in traditional brick-

and-mortar schools teach one or two iSucceed classes in the evening. Some are stay-at-home moms.

“We’ve got some really good teachers,” Green said. “Next year, we’ll probably take our rock stars and hire them full-time.”

“It’s great,” Sandra Gerlach said. “We don’t feel like we’re out here in the middle of nowhere with no support.”

David Quallio said the virtual academy has already helped his daughter make strides scholastically.

Quallio said his daughter has made more progress in mathematics since joining iSucceed than she had after a couple of years in regular public high school.

“It’s an excellent alternative,” he said. “There are a lot of alternative schools, but (iSucceed) seem(s) to have figured it out.”

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