

Open Campus Background

Benefits for Students

Are you a student considering whether a virtual class is right for you? Online courses offer a number of benefits. Let's break it down:

You're Pace, Your Place

Wouldn't it be nice to take a class from the comfort of your own room or while on the go? With Open Campus, you can study anywhere you have an Internet connection. Open Campus online courses do not have dedicated meeting times. You can study and work on assignments on your own schedule and at your own pace. OC 1, High School 0.

Cool Courses

Open Campus offers classes that you may not have the opportunity to take at your school. How about Astronomy or Business Spanish? We've got you covered.

Own Your Time

Students choose online courses because they offer flexibility with work schedules, sports practice and other commitments. Most courses are scheduled at the start of the day or end of the day. You will have online assignment and coursework deadlines. However, you can decide when it is convenient to work on the course. Like to stay up late to study? No problem!

Rigorous and Rewarding

Online courses are not for the meek. The content is challenging, the assignments require serious effort and the classes will pump you up for college and beyond. Those of you with weak constitutions may want to leave the stadium! However, if you are up for the challenge, you'll find the experience incredibly rewarding.

Social Scene

Open Campus classes blend students from three neighboring high schools. Mix it up and have fun meeting and working with new friends in a safe online environment.

Build Your Personal Brand

Online learning and training is exploding. Colleges are offering more and more online courses. Business and industry are increasingly turning to virtual training. With the Open Campus experience, you'll get a jump on your future career.

Expand Your Learning

With a more flexible school schedule, you're open to a larger variety of internships and work opportunities to help prepare you for life after high school! Such experiences can give you the edge over others when applying for colleges and careers.

Finish High School Early

If you like to get ahead, Open Campus is the program for you! Taking additional classes at your own pace could set you up to graduate earlier. What's not to like about that?

Benefits for Parents

Welcome to the future of education! Online learning is a powerful innovation for student learning. However, Open Campus courses are not an easy road. Classes are rigorous, the pace is brisk and teachers maintain high academic expectations. Students who lack self-discipline or intrinsic motivation will not do well in Open Campus courses. If you know your son or daughter is up for the challenge, you'll discover many advantages:

Local Teachers You Know and Trust

Unlike most virtual school programs, all Open Campus courses are taught by experienced high school teachers from each partner school district. Our teachers designed and developed the curriculum; they know their stuff.

High Academic Standards

Our three large districts have high academic expectations for all students, both traditional and virtual. We work to ensure your son or daughter is receiving the most well-rounded and standards-based education available.

Flexible Schedule Options

We know that traditional school schedules simply do not work for some students. Open Campus courses offer your child the freedom to learn at their own pace and in a place of their choosing. Virtual courses are perfect for busy schedules.

Preparing Students For the Workplace

Businesses are turning to E-Learning as the preferred method of training. Open Campus courses provide a similar online training experience and may give your child an advantage in the workplace.

Setting the Stage for Lifelong Learning

Kahn Academy, MOOCs, edX: e-Learning is exploding in popularity. Preparing for life after high school, an Open Campus course can help instill a love of learning for your child's entire lifetime.

Reducing Your Taxes

Open Campus has the potential to save millions of school dollars through more efficient facility usage, reduced operation expenses, and the elimination of many new construction costs. In addition, every year the public schools lose hundreds of thousands of dollars in funding when students opt to attend cyber schools. Through Open Campus PA, students can earn a diploma from their home district school that is respected by colleges and the military – An attractive online option that will return cyber school dollars to our local schools.

Technology Help

Q: What general software packages should be used for Open Campus courses?

A: Most courses will require a general office suite such as MS Office, LibreOffice (free) or GoogleDocs (free). Access to a current web browser (Firefox, Chrome, Safari or Internet Explorer) is essential. Note that some courses may require other software packages due to specific requirements. These requirements should be included in the course syllabus.

Q: Where can I find my Open Campus course?

A: Your course will be found on the Moodle site of the teacher's home district:

Hempfield: <https://moodle.hempfieldsd.org>

Manheim Township: <http://moodle2.mtwp.net>

Penn Manor: <https://moodle.pennmanor.net>

Q: What email address will be utilized by Open Campus students?

A: Students will not receive a new Open Campus email account. They may use a personal email address or, an email address provided by the home district (Outlook.com, Gmail, Yahoo, etc). Teachers may also use the messaging feature in Moodle.

Q: Where do teachers and students go for help?

A: Each partner district maintains a support site or email line:

Hempfield: http://start.students.hempfieldsd.org/?page_id=27 or call the Technology Department at 717.898.5596

Manheim Township: Send an email to: tsr@mtwp.net

Penn Manor: <https://support.pennmanor.net> or call the help desk at 717.872.9500 x1776

Q: Should students maintain an avatar?

A: Yes. Students are encouraged to create a school-appropriate avatar as a profile picture. Teachers and students may change their profile pictures in Moodle by navigating to "Settings" – "Edit Profile Settings" – "User Picture."

Testimonials

OpenCampusPA is a unique education experience. Learn what it is like to be part of the program through the first-person accounts of our students, teachers and parents.

Ked Kantz – Open Campus Social Studies Teacher, Manheim Township SD

Technology is, arguably, the language of our students in today's interconnected world. As we seek to engage our students, we, as educators, must speak this language. The Open Campus initiative helps facilitate this in a meaningful way. Open Campus allows us new avenues to teach the 21st Century skills of collaboration and communication, which will be absolute necessities for the next generation of global learners.

Open Campus allows us to teach a variety of subjects across disciplines and across districts. Students have the opportunity to get out of their "bubbles" and broaden their horizons. With new opportunities come new challenges. It is true that Open Campus requires students to be personally and academically driven. Students are given more responsibility for their learning and to be a successful Open Campus student one must be disciplined and organized. Learning such skills in high school is a great asset for any student looking to continue their education in college, where online learning is also expanding.

Programs like Open Campus teach students, and teachers for that matter, how to build relationships in a digital age. Together, we learn how to be respectful, responsible digital learners. It is these skills that our students will be called upon to have in the global marketplace they are entering. Why not get started learning these things right away?

Scott & Laura Fiore – Open Campus Parent, Manheim Township SD

So far this semester we are quite pleased with the Open Campus Program. This style of learning has been a success for our daughter. For a generation raised online we have seen our daughter take naturally to working and communicating electronically.

Our daughter has excelled in some classes and had some setbacks in others. She's learned first-hand the consequences of falling behind, but at the same time has also learned to successfully collaborate in an electronic environment with students from other districts. We continue to be excited about the program and look forward to its expansion.

Mary Mathews – Open Campus Parent, Hempfield SD

My daughter had the chance take one of the Open Campus online classes during the first semester of the 2011-12 school year. This was such a great opportunity for her. During the semester, she also had two traditional classes that were AP level, was involved in many extra curricular activities and had a part time job, which meant she didn't have much free time. With the online class, I liked the fact that she was able to set her own pace throughout the week of what she needed to get completed. If she knew that she had an extra busy time coming up with other classes or activities, she could work ahead in this class for the week and get the assignments done early. This was a great preparation for college next year when time management is essential.

The support given by the teacher met my expectations as well. I was a little concerned at first that if she needed help with something, she wouldn't be able to get in touch with the teacher or the teacher might not respond to her messages. There was nothing to be concerned about, however, since the teacher was always very prompt in getting back to her when she needed help.

I hope the school districts continue to expand on the variety of courses that will be offered for Open Campus. I have a daughter in the eighth grade as well and I am looking forward to the opportunities that she will have as this program expands.

PA Secretary of Education Visit

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The Pennsylvania Secretary of Education, Ron Tomalis, visited on Tuesday, January 29 to observe students and educators demonstrating the Open Campus PA program. Joining Tomalis for a tour and press conference at Hempfield School District were Representatives Ryan Aument, Keith Greiner and Steven Mentzer as well as Hempfield School District Superintendent Dr. Brenda Becker, Manheim Township School District Superintendent Dr. Gene Freeman and Penn Manor School District Superintendent Dr. Michael Lechlitter. Mr. Tomalis and the legislators were able to talk with students and teachers currently involved with courses through Open Campus PA.







Three school districts here will merge teaching efforts - LancasterOnline: News

BRIAN WALLACE Staff Writer | Posted: Wednesday, December 28, 2011 11:01 pm

Imagine a high school where students can take classes as early as 7 a.m. or as late as 9 p.m.

Some of the courses are taught face-to-face in the school, with others delivered online and still others taught through a mix of classroom and computer-based instruction.

At this school, tuition is free and students can enroll in specialty courses such as Latin and business Spanish that their home schools don't offer.

And by taking classes at night or over the summer, they could earn a diploma faster than their peers.

So how do students sign up?

Well, if they attend Penn Manor, Hempfield or Manheim Township high schools, they're already enrolled.

The three Lancaster County schools plan to unveil an "open campus" project in the fall that is believed to be the first collaborative effort of its kind in Pennsylvania.

Across the state, many school districts have their own cyberschools or contracts with outside companies or groups to offer online courses to their students.

But this is the first time districts have collaborated to offer their own courses taught by their own teachers in online and "live" formats to students from multiple school districts.

Tim Eller, spokesman for the Pennsylvania Department of Education, said he's not aware of any other program like it run entirely by school districts.

The open campus project will blur the lines between school districts and alter the traditional school schedule, while helping to preserve teaching jobs, cut costs and stem the tide of students fleeing public schools for cybercharters, school officials say.

But the biggest benefit, they say, is that it will give students more choices. And "school choice" - in the form of tuition vouchers and increased competition from charter schools - is a major theme in Gov. Tom Corbett's education agenda.

"Choice is coming whether we like it or not, and we need to get out in front of it," said Brenda Becker, Hempfield superintendent. "We have to change the way we do business if we're going to survive."

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The open campus idea originated from meetings Penn Manor superintendent Michael Leichter held in the summer with families that had left Penn Manor for cybercharter schools.

What he discovered, Leichter said, was that most students weren't disillusioned with the district; they just wanted more options to fit their schedules, including a mix of online and "bricks-and-mortar" classes.

When Leichter shared his findings with Becker in September, they agreed the two districts should consider collaborating to address those needs. Manheim Township joined the consortium, and officials from the three districts began meeting.

The open campus project is driven by Becker's belief that the districts' teachers can deliver a better education program than anything offered by a cybercharter school.

Early on, the superintendents made a conscious decision to bring all parties - teachers, principals and union representatives - on board in the planning stages to avoid potential conflicts.

"Our approach is, we're not forcing this on anybody," Becker said. "We're not forcing it on students, and we're not forcing it on faculty."

"Only those folks who want this as an option can do it, and that's alleviated a lot of fear and anxiety."

While students have yet to learn the details of the project, the response from teachers has been positive, superintendents say.

Nearly a third of Penn Manor's staff attended open campus informational meetings, Leichter said, and the three districts have had more teachers than they need volunteer to deliver the first-year courses.

Twelve classes will be offered to juniors and seniors beginning in September, including English 11 and 12, U.S. history, civics/economics, global perspectives, advanced-placement calculus, pre-calculus and astronomy, all of which will be taught online.

Students will be able to access the material at any time of day or night, and teachers will provide office hours during which they'll be available for live, individualized help.

Four other courses - Latin I, business Spanish, physics and chemistry - will be taught in a hybrid format of online instruction, classroom teaching and labs.

The three districts are sharing course-development duties and hope to enroll an equal amount of students in each class.

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The venture won't cost the districts additional money, Leichliter said, because existing staff and course materials are being utilized, and free open-source software will be used to deliver the online instruction.

Over time, the project could cut costs because districts won't need to hire teachers for some specialized subjects taught at neighboring districts. It also will save jobs, Becker said, by providing a larger pool of students for low-enrollment courses that otherwise might be cut.

"As resources are shrinking, we can no longer afford to run classes where maybe only six students sign up," she said.

Once the project is expanded, it also could reduce the need for expensive school construction projects.

"Right now, we're tapped out at the high school in terms of space," Becker said. "If I don't have all those kids in the high school at the same time, it may eliminate the need for me to do a multimillion-dollar construction project."

The districts are purposely starting out small - only about 300 students may enroll the first year - and will retain the traditional school schedule for most students and teachers.

But in future years, the districts want to explore offering classes at night and over the summer, which would enable motivated students to earn their diplomas much more quickly. That also could free up more space at the three high schools.

To provide those options, the districts likely would need waivers from the state Department of Education, which mandates the number of days in the school year, hours of instruction in core subjects and other issues.

State officials have been "very supportive" of their efforts so far, the superintendents said, but much work remains.

"The (Pennsylvania) School Code and state Board of Education regulations create a really tight box for us that we have to stay within, and moving outside of the box will take a lot of work and a lot of waivers on the part of the state," Leichliter said.

"We can no longer use the same agrarian-based education model we've used for the last 100 years."

As the project expands, the districts will face other regulatory gray areas.

For example, if a Manheim Township 11th-grader is taught math by a Penn Manor teacher, which district would get credit for that pupil's PSSA math scores?

Which district would be credited for the subject-area tests all students must pass to receive a diploma? How will teacher evaluations be handled when students are from multiple districts?

The superintendents are confident these logistical issues can be worked out and are hoping the state treats the open campus project as a pilot exempt from many regulations in its first few years.

Eller said the Department of Education is "committed to working with these districts to ensure that this innovative program remains an option for students."

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The three districts also must secure agreements with their teachers' unions to allow staff to deviate from the traditional workday stipulated in their labor contracts.

The superintendents don't expect that to be a problem because teachers realize the value of the open campus project and appreciate the potential for more flexible hours, they said.

"We have staff who are very excited about it because some of them will have the ability to stay home with their children during part of the day and maybe teach later in the day," Becker said.

Tony Carrodo, a Penn Manor math teacher, said he volunteered to teach a calculus course because he considers the project the wave of the future.

"I thought it was important, as our district does, to get in on it as early as we can," said Carrodo, who plans to include video clips, online tutorials and links to other Internet sites as part of his AP calculus curriculum.

"It's going to be different. It's going to be a challenge. But it's the way things are going," he said. "We don't want to let it pass us by."

Another Penn Manor math teacher, Dori O'Connor, said the open campus classes will provide more options for students.

"I really like the fact that students will have a choice where they can do a little bit of both - they can do some regular classes and some online," said O'Connor, who has never taught an online class before.

To assure that her students "get that teacher aspect of the class," she plans to keep on top of their progress by maintaining office hours where pupils can talk to her in person or via Skype or iChat, O'Connor said.

Exactly what each course will look like will be determined in the coming months as teachers and administrators develop curricula. The three superintendents hope to have most details worked out by the end of June so training and other preparations can be completed well before classes begin in the fall.

Given the financial constraints that all public schools face, the open campus project is likely to be the first of many collaborative efforts for county school districts, said Gene Freeman, Manheim Township superintendent.

"The change is inevitable, and we either work to control the change or the change controls us," he said.

"If we can piggyback and create more choices for students, I think that's what so many districts are going to need to do."

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