**Commonwealth Virtual Schools**

A Commonwealth of Virtual School is a public school . Like a charter school, a virtual school is an autonomous, single-school district that operates independently of any existing school district.

The Board of Elementary and Secondary Education grants a certificate to the board of trustees of a virtual school. The school and its board then becomes a state entity, directly accountable to the Board and the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education.

Like all public schools, a virtual school cannot discriminate in the enrollment of students on the basis of race, color, national origin, creed, sex, gender identity, ethnicity, sexual orientation, mental or physical disability, age, ancestry, athletic performance, special need, English language proficiency, or academic achievement.

**Questions and Answers for Sending Districts**

**Last Updated April 7, 2018**

**What is a Commonwealth Virtual School (CMVS)? Is it a public school?**

A Commonwealth Virtual School (CMVS) is a public school operated by a board of trustees where teachers primarily teach from a remote location using the Internet or other computer-based methods and students are not required to be located at the physical premises of the school. Two virtual schools currently operate in Massachusetts: [Greenfield Commonwealth Virtual School (GCVS)](http://profiles.doe.mass.edu/general/general.aspx?topNavID=1&leftNavId=100&orgcode=39010000&orgtypecode=5) and [TEC Connections Academy Commonwealth Virtual School (TECCA)](http://profiles.doe.mass.edu/general/general.aspx?topNavID=1&leftNavId=100&orgcode=39020000&orgtypecode=5). Both enroll students in kindergarten through twelfth grade.

**Who can attend a CMVS?**

Any student in Massachusetts can apply for admission to a CMVS. If more students apply to a CMVS than there is space available, the school will hold a lottery to determine which students will be admitted. Once admitted to a CMVS, a student is entitled to attend in subsequent years without reapplying. For information about a particular CMVS, or to apply for admission, contact the school directly.

**How are we notified when parents/guardians decide to enroll their child in a CMVS?**

The CMVS must notify the sending district in writing of the number and grade levels of students who shall be attending the CMVS from the sending districts within 10 days of the student registering for enrollment in the CMVS. Additionally, the Department provides sending districts with preliminary reports in January showing the name, grade, program, and estimated annual tuition for each pupil reported in the previous CMVS October data collection.

**What do I do if a student is reported as enrolled in a CMVS but is also attending a school in my district?**

Students may not enroll full-time in a CMVS student while attending another public school. A student may only count in the foundation enrollment of a single district or CMVS. Districts and CMVSs are encouraged to work together to resolve any enrollment discrepancies. Discrepancies that cannot be resolved may be reported to the Department.

**What tuition will my district be charged for each student who attends a CMVS?**

The virtual school statute, at G.L. c. 71, § 94(k), funds a CMVS based upon the funding for school choice under G.L. c. 76, § 12B: the sending district is charged a set tuition, and the Department transfers the funds from the district to the CMVS. Tuition is based on full year enrollment and is prorated if a student is enrolled in the CMVS for only a portion of the school year. The annual per pupil tuition amount for GCVS and TECCA is $8,265. The tuition for special education students is the cost of providing the special education required by the student. G.L. c. 71, § 94(k). Please refer to the chart on the next page for how tuition is calculated and distributed for a fictitious CMVS over the course of a fiscal year (July 1-June 30).

**May our students take online (virtual) courses at a CMVS on a part-time basis?**

Students may take courses offered by a CMVS if the district and the CMVS have entered into an agreement to provide such courses. Any student taking courses per that agreement should still be included in the sending district's foundation enrollment. The agreement should stipulate the amount the CMVS may charge for courses. As would be true for any coursework outside of school, parents/guardians should know in advance how the virtual course will be treated in terms of grades, course credit, and grade point average (GPA).

**Which entity is responsible for arranging and paying for the cost of services required by an IEP?**

A CMVS is responsible for arranging for the services required by an IEP, and sending districts are required to pay the cost of the services, through add-ons to the base tuition rate. The cost of special education services is calculated in accordance with [603 CMR 10.07(3) - the circuit breaker costing methodology](http://www.doe.mass.edu/finance/circuitbreaker/). The virtual district can develop the special education services needed to serve its students, contract with third parties to provide them, or work collaboratively with a district or group of districts (such as in a collaborative) to provide services. For example, if the sending district agrees to provide the services, the CMVS would not bill the cost of the service to the district, because the district would be providing it in kind.

**Can my district restrict student enrollment in a CMVS?**

The school committee of a sending district may vote restrict enrollment of its students in a CMVS if the total enrollment of students enrolled the CMVS from the district exceeds 1 per cent of the total enrollment in its district; provided, however, that no student enrolled in a CMVS can be compelled to withdraw because of that vote. Only full-time CMVS students count towards the 1 per cent threshold. School committees must communicate a vote to restrict enrollment for the following school year to the Department no later than April 30.

**How do we obtain information about students enrolled in virtual schools for the School Attending Children Report?**

To assist districts in collecting relevant data from the state's Commonwealth Virtual Schools the Department provides files to districts via the SIMS Exchange File in Dropbox Central by January 31 each year. Among other information, the file contains the first and last name, date of birth, street address, and withdrawal code (if necessary) for each student enrolled in the virtual school between the start of the school year and January 1, 2018.

**What is my district's responsibility when a student attends a *private* virtual school?**

If the private virtual school is based in a Massachusetts city or town, the law requires the school committee of that city or town to approve the school, as it would any other private school. For more information, see [Advisory on Approval of Massachusetts Private Schools Pursuant to Mass. Gen. Laws c. 76, §1](http://www.doe.mass.edu/lawsregs/advisory/100207privateschool.html). The private virtual school is required to report any students from your district enrolled in the school. If the private virtual school is not based in Massachusetts, the law requires the district to treat the student as a homeschooled student. In that case, the district reviews and approves the student's educational plan. For more information, see question 19 of [Frequently Asked Questions - Program Quality Assurance Services](http://www.doe.mass.edu/pqa/ta/f03am_qa.html).

**What standards should my district use when approving a private virtual school based in its town?**

The district should refer to the [Advisory on Approval of Massachusetts Private Schools Pursuant to Mass. Gen. Laws c. 76, §1](http://www.doe.mass.edu/lawsregs/advisory/100207privateschool.html). In addition, the district can refer to the Department’s [Online Course Quality and Online Instructor Quality](http://www.doe.mass.edu/odl/access-safety.html) resources.