



## DEPARTMENT of CHILDREN and FAMILIES

*Making a Difference for Children, Families and Communities*



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Commissioner

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**“Virtual Academy” Online Learning And Tutoring  
Provides Path To College For Youth In Foster Care**  
*Education Effort To Increase The 549 Youth Attending Post-Secondary Programs*

HARTFORD – The Virtual Academy, a new online education and tutoring program, is helping youth in foster care achieve the academic progress to graduate high school and earn entrance into college and other post-secondary education programs.

The program began earlier this year and already has helped 100 students earn class credits toward high school graduation. Students take a variety of courses online, check in with a teacher via a secure website, and can contact the teacher for assistance. All core subjects (English, Math, Science, Social Studies), as well as remediation, SAT prep, GED assistance and electives are available. Seven full-time, certified teachers collectively cover all the core subject areas. To ensure the program is effective and students are progressing, the teachers check-in with their assigned students daily to provide individualized instruction, assess progress, and adjust curriculum.

Nationally and in Connecticut, youth in foster care experience a variety of hardships, including higher rates of poverty, homelessness, involvement in adult correctional and mental health systems, and other outcomes that are reflective of lower educational achievement. In Connecticut, youth in foster care are a low performing subgroup in math and reading standardized tests.

The Virtual Academy is an effort by the Department of Children and Families (DCF) to address this critical educational need. “By improving education for our most disadvantaged youth, we are doing the right thing for them as individuals, but also for our state overall,” Governor Malloy said. “This is a great example of how state government can do more to help those who need it most.”

DCF Commissioner Joette Katz said the State has a special responsibility to prepare foster children to become independent and successful adults upon leaving state care. “Children in foster care, face many challenges and obstacles – and in many instances, they face those challenges without the family and other supports that most children have,” Commissioner Katz said. “So if the state can do something to boost these youth, then we have a special responsibility to give them a fighting chance to succeed.”

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Although youth in foster care are especially challenged in attaining success in school, many of them overcome the obstacles and succeed academically. Connecticut has one of the nation's most advanced programs for supporting post-secondary education and allows students to attend a college until age 23 with financial support from the state. In a typical year in Connecticut, between 500 and 600 youth in foster care are able to attend a two-year or four-year college, a trade school, or another post-secondary program with financial assistance provided by the Department. This fiscal year, there are 549 youth attending post-secondary programs.

In many instances, students who use the Virtual Academy program also attend a public school or other school, often on part-time basis tailored to meet the student's specific needs. Some of the students are in special education programs or have an Individualized Education Plan (IEP). Participation in the Virtual Academy is then used to augment the school program or to help the student make up credits after having fallen behind other students their age. Currently there are 95 students benefitting from the Virtual Academy, and more than 40 credits have been earned by students across the state.

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