What is the Digital Academy Program?

The Digital Academy Program is an opportunity designed for students in Kindergarten through 12th grade to engage in learning digitally 100% of the time. Students participating will engage in digital learning entirely from home, while also staying connected to their assigned home school.

Students may continue to receive school-level virtual services and support, implemented by the staff at the students' home school. Such services may include tele-counseling, tele-services, virtual assemblies, virtual field trips, and afterschool activities. Because students opting for the Digital Academy are choosing an entirely remote option, they will not have the option of participating in any in-person activities, such as extra-curricular groups or scholastic athletics that may meet in person.

Please note, families choosing the Digital Academy option are expected to commit to at least the first two terms (one half school year / semester) of the 2020-2021 academic year. Once the student begins the Digital Academy, the student is required to complete the full semester. At the mid-year point, students can continue as a Digital Academy student, or may choose to transition to the hybrid model at their enrolled school after the completion of the semester. The earliest opportunity to transition to the hybrid model will be during the third term in January.

Decisions regarding continued enrollment in the Digital Academy for the 2020-2021 school year are determined by health conditions, and federal, state, and local guidance. In particular, the District will focus on guidance from the City of Philadelphia and Philadelphia Department of Public Health, the Governor and Pennsylvania Department of Health, and the Pennsylvania Department of Education, the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and health and science experts.
Overview of Student Experience

- Students will participate in 5 full days of digital instruction, Monday through Friday, designed to be as comparable as possible to the daily instruction provided in the hybrid model.
- Grades Kindergarten through eighth (8th), will focus on core content areas, including English Language Arts, Mathematics, Science and Social Studies, Arts, Health and Physical Education.
- Ninth (9th) through twelfth (12th) grades students will receive instruction in core content areas, Arts, Health and Physical Education. High school students may participate in elective coursework, provided with through a learning management system, that are aligned with graduation requirements.
- Electives offered in the Digital Academy may be different in number, variety, and content, than the electives that might be available in their home school.
- The Digital Academy will not provide certain coursework that is offered in a student’s currently assigned school, including specific elective courses, Career and Technical Training (CTE) courses, International Baccalaureate (IB), and JROTC.

Expectations

- Core courses will be taught by teachers assigned to the Digital Academy. Elective courses are self-paced by the students, and monitored and supported by elective teachers in the Digital Academy.
- Teachers will assess each student’s learning and provide instructional interventions and support, as necessary.
- The Digital Academy requires students to attend daily, as attendance is documented in alignment with the District’s attendance policy and procedures. Digital Academy teachers will document attendance and provide grades for students’ academic performance. Students will be required to attend each day as scheduled, complete all assignments, and meet all expectations, just as they would in the hybrid model.
- All students enrolled in the Digital Academy will be required to follow the expectations for conduct and behavior as stated in the School District of Philadelphia Student Code of Conduct.
- The district will progress monitor instructional expectations and experiences as our goal is for students who are utilizing this option to receive a similar quality of instruction as offered to students in the hybrid learning model.
- Digital Academy teachers will use the same instructional resources and strategies to facilitate digital learning as are used by teachers in the hybrid model.

Who can participate in the Digital Academy?
The Digital Academy is open to any School District of Philadelphia student who is interested in a fully remote option.

Students must be:

- Currently enrolled in a District-led school;
- Can commit to at least the first two terms (one half school year / semester) of time when registering;
- Able to participate in a regular full-day instructional program at home five days per week;
- Supervised during the course of the school day;
  - Older siblings, who are also students in the District, are required to fully participate in their instructional program and may not have the ability to supervise younger siblings.
Additionally, the Digital Academy may be suitable for:

- Pregnant or parenting teens;
- Students who receive special education supports and services that can be provided through digital learning and teleservices. (See below.)
- Students who receive ESOL support; and
- Students who are medically fragile or have a medical condition that prohibits their return to school-level hybrid learning, but are able to participate in 5 full days of instruction, per week.

Please note:
While the Digital Academy is open to students who receive services regarding English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) and students who receive special education supports and services, the Digital Academy may not be able to provide all of the benefits of in person instruction and services that the District is planning through the hybrid model.

Specifically, in the hybrid model, the District is prioritizing certain students receiving special education supports, who have complex needs, for a four-day/week in person model, with virtual Fridays. Students who have complex needs include students in our low incidence Autism Support, Multi-Disabilities Support, Life Skills Support, Deaf and Hard of Hearing program, and Visually Impaired programs. The priority is intended to provide further support to those students who require more intensive services, or whose services are more effectively provided in person.

When parents are making decisions about what is best for their children and their families, they should keep in mind that related services, for students who receive special education supports and services, are provided remotely if their student is enrolled in the Digital Academy Program, so that the purposes of the fully digital option can be realized.

Interested in the Digital Academy Option for your Child?
Registration opens July 22, 2020, and closes on August 4, 2020. At this time, the digital academy is available to current district students. As we learn more about interest and our capacity to serve new students we will do our very best to make the digital academy available for future students to SDP.

Registration information is available on the Office of Student Enrollment and Placement’s website and can be accessed here https://www.philasd.org/studentplacement/dainterestform.

Information needed to register includes:
- Student’s Name;
- Student’s Date of Birth;
- Student’s school identification number;
- Student’s current assigned school;
- Student’s special education status, if applicable;
- Student’s primary language;
- Parent/Guardian contact information; and
- Copy of Parent/Guardian’s valid Photo I.D.

The deadline to express interest for the Digital Academy Program is August 4th.
Frequently Asked Questions

Will students remain in the Digital Academy if all schools transition to 100% remote?
Yes, students will remain in the Digital Academy for the terms they committed. Transition requests will be granted on a case by case basis upon review of the school-based team, and the Offices of Student Support Services and Academic Supports.

Will specialty courses such as International Baccalaureate (IB), Career and Technical Education, and JROTC programs be offered?
No.

What elective courses will be offered in the Digital Academy?
Select number of elective courses required for graduation will be offered.

How will students be able to participate in Athletic and Extracurricular Programs?
Students may participate in extracurricular programming virtually at their home school. Students will not have the option of participating in any in-person activities, such as extra-curricular groups or scholastic athletics that may meet in person.

How will students have access to counseling services?
Students will have access to counseling services virtually at their home school.

Who can be a Digital Academy student?
The Digital Academy is open to any current district student who is interested. Families should consider their specific circumstances to determine if the Digital Academy option fits their needs.

My child is at or has been accepted to a special admit school, does enrolling in the Digital Academy mean they lose their spot?
No. Students will remain enrolled at their current home school.

May my child go back to their home school or will we need to reapply after the Digital Academy term ends?
Students will remain enrolled at their current home school. However, a student must remain enrolled in the Digital Academy for a minimum of two terms.

Will my students fall behind if they enroll in the Digital Academy?
Students should receive high quality instructional programming as comparable as possible to what they would receive in the hybrid model. Student progress and performance will be monitored and assessed to ensure quality.

My student is going to be a senior. Will they still be able to walk at the graduation?
Seniors will be able to participate in graduation with their home school in a manner appropriate under general health and safety guidelines.
My child has an IEP. How will the Digital Academy support my child?
Students with IEPs will be able to access and benefit from instruction in the Digital Academy. Students with IEPs will have opportunities to engage with their peers, general education teachers, special education teachers, and related services providers, all as prescribed by their IEPs, and will have access to the digital supports that align with their IEPs.

Do I need a computer for Digital Academy?
Yes. Students will need access to a computer and internet to participate in the digital academy.

Will the Digital Academy follow the same academic calendar as schools in the district?
Yes, the District Academic Calendar applies to the Digital Academy. Regularly scheduled holidays, teacher professional development days, assessment days, and breaks will apply as outlined.

How do I express interest for my child to participate? When can I submit an interest form?
Registration opens July 22, 2020, and closes on August 4, 2020. Registration information is available on the Office of Student Enrollment and Placement’s website and can be accessed here https://www.philasd.org/studentplacement/dainterestform.

What happens once I complete the interest form?
Once student and parent information is collected, vetted and approved, based on the established criteria, the student’s enrollment in the Digital Academy will be uploaded in the District’s Student Information System (SIS) and the Digital Academy team will build each student’s schedule and notify the family of the student’s enrollment, the assigned teacher(s), and other relevant information in coordination with the student’s home school.

For the latest updates and information please visit philasd.org/schoolstart2020.