

Midwestern Regional Virtual Charter School

School Profile

The ultimate goal of the Midwestern Regional Virtual Charter School is to provide a good program at a reasonable cost. Students in grades 2-12 are currently enrolled, but the school is capable of enrolling students in grades K-12. Founded by a group of superintendents from Midwestern Intermediate Unit 4 (MIU IV), the school opened in September 2001. Every one of the 26 superintendents within the Intermediate Unit serve on the Board of Trustees and many of the schools' services, including the staff of the school, are contracted to MIU IV. There are currently no personnel that are employed by the cyber school. Instead, the school's board has contracted to the MIU IV for the services of its personnel. The MIU IV personnel who will allocate some of their time to the operation of the cyber school are as follows (estimated hours per week worked by the contracted employee):

- CAO-also the Executive Director of the MIU IV (four hours)
- Distance Education Coordinator (30 hours)
- Clerical (20 hours)
- Business Manager (four hours)

There are also a number of MIU IV employees that will be made available to the cyber school on an as needed basis including an:

- Attorney
- Director of Special Education
- Director of Instruction
- Director of Technology
- Special Education Teacher
- Nurse
- Guidance Counselors
- School Psychologists
- Technology Support Personnel

In addition to the staff mentioned above, any other MIU IV human resource that may be needed in the operation of the cyber school will be made available. All MIU IV staff members that would be supporting the operation of the cyber school are certified by the state of Pennsylvania.

While enrollment will vary throughout the year, as the school is offering open enrollment, 68 students are currently enrolled in the Midwestern Regional Virtual Charter School. Ten of these

students are listed as requiring special education services. 29 additional students are on the school's waiting list. The current student population is predominantly made up of high school students with only three students enrolled in grades six and below. Even though the school is willing to enroll students from throughout the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, it is focused on primarily offering this alternative opportunity to students within MIU IV who are not successful in a regular classroom and/or would benefit from this type of individualized program. 55 of the school's students are from a traditional public school while only eight were formerly home schooled.

Prior to beginning school, students must take an initial assessment and attend orientation with his/her parents. In collaboration with MIU IV's Distance Education/Planning Coordinator, students and parents then create individualized education plans. The American Education Corporation's *A+nywhere Learning System (A+LS)* is the Midwestern Regional Virtual Charter School's primary courseware provider for its first year of operation. This curriculum was selected because it is a full K-12 curriculum, is cost effective (\$9.65 a month per student) and is aligned to Pennsylvania state standards. Using this system as a method of instruction requires students to spend approximately 90% of their time online.

The school has not been able to provide a detailed budget for the school. School management estimates that the cost of operating the school is \$2,000 per student, but has not provided support for that analysis. The current estimated cost per student (\$2,000) is unique from the budget of other cyber charter schools because it does not include the costs (e.g., school personnel, repair technicians, room rental, telephone line usage) provided by MIU IV, an Intermediate Unit that has a \$62 million annual budget. The \$2,000 cost per student does include the student's computer, monitor, printer, scanner, ink cartridges, cabling, MS Office, ISP fees, Fortress security software, paper, pencils. Management has developed a hypothetical budget that shows a cost per student of \$4,428, but is based on an enrollment of 500 students, which the school is far from achieving.

This section of the report assesses the Midwestern Regional Virtual Cyber Charter School in the following areas:

- Accountability Methods and Systems
- Governance and Oversight
- Cost Analysis

Accountability Methods and Systems

Evaluation Goal

The goal of the Accountability Methods and Systems evaluation was to assess whether a clearly defined and robust accountability system is in place to support achievement of a quality education.

Summary

The Midwestern Regional Virtual Charter school has just entered its first year of operation. The American Education Corporation's *A+nywhere Learning System (A+LS)* is the school's primary method of measuring student achievement. For most of the evaluation criteria below, Midwestern is in the planning stage.

Evaluation Criteria and Findings

The table below identifies the key criteria used to evaluate each cyber charter school and a description of how each school met these criteria.

<i>Student Achievement</i>	<i>Current Status</i>
<p>1. Ability to measure student engagement and progress</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The MIU IV Distance Education Coordinator will proctor an initial assessment to serve as a baseline level of student achievement. This assessment is included as a part of the A+LS system. ▪ Student progress through the A+LS curriculum will be monitored by the MIU IV Distance Education Coordinator who will use reporting tools provided by the curriculum management software to determine if the student is adequately progressing through his/her course of study. ▪ The A+LS system has a broad reporting system where the cyber charter facilitator can receive multiple reports on the work completed by the person who logs on. The facilitator can inspect progress and adjust assignments accordingly. If engagement is correlated to the number of responses completed, the cyber facilitator can track progress. ▪ The MIU IV Distance Education Coordinator plans to check each student's progress on a weekly basis.

<i>Student Achievement</i>	<i>Current Status</i>
2. Documentation of positive trends in all subject areas for students such as beginning of year, monthly and end-of-year online assessments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Parents will log offline work (e.g., projects). ▪ No student performance results exist as school opens in fall 2001.
3. Documentation of positive trends in student attendance, retention, dropout, and graduation rate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ No student results exist as school opens in fall 2001.
4. Ability to measure student authenticity of work (e.g., logs, records of study)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Students will take an initial assessment, midterms and final examinations in-person at the Midwestern Intermediate Unit MIU IV computer lab. Tests, which are part of the A+LS curriculum, will include multiple choice, fill in the blank and essay questions. ▪ Midwestern has two local assessment times per semester. All student participants will come to the MIU IV lab for an in-person assessment using the ALS created assessments.
5. Compliance with students taking the Pennsylvania System of School Assessment (PSSA) in accordance with Chapter 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Students will take the PSSA in-person at the MIU IV computer lab.
6. Student attendance - compliance with compulsory attendance laws	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Four to seven hours of active work on the curriculum software are required five times a week in order to comply with attendance laws.

<i>Personnel Evaluation</i>	<i>Current Status</i>
7. Teacher experience/certification	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ All MIU IV staff that will participate in the operation of the cyber school are certified by the state of Pennsylvania.
8. Method of performance evaluation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The cyber school will use the same method of personnel evaluation procedures as the MIU IV. A “Non-Bargaining Unit Personnel Employee Rating Form” will be completed to evaluate each employee. This evaluation form includes three primary criteria for evaluation: personality (personality qualities, attitude and decision making ability), preparation (job knowledge

<i>Personnel Evaluation</i>	<i>Current Status</i>
	<p>and employee development) and technique (planning, organizing and performing duties). Based on these criteria, employees are give an overall rating of either satisfactory or unsatisfactory. The form also includes a space for a summary and recommendations.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Two consecutive unsatisfactory ratings of a non-bargaining unit employee are necessary to support a dismissal on the grounds of incompetence. ▪ The employee has the option to submit a written statement to accompany the report and may also request a meeting with the Executive Director of the MIU IV.
9. Frequency of performance evaluation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ MIU IV staff assisting in the operation of the cyber school will be evaluated twice a year.
10. Documentation of positive trends in personnel attendance and retention	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ No personnel results exist as school opens in fall 2001.
11. Personnel attendance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ MIU IV staff who will assist in the operation of the cyber school will follow the MIU IV's sign-in and sign-out policy for tracking personnel attendance.
12. Professional development program and alignment to instructional approach	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ MIU IV staff who will assist in the operation of the cyber school will be offered the same professional development programs, resources and services that the MIU IV offers to all schools in the surrounding three counties that it serves. Professional development offerings include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Best Practices Symposium – Cooperative Professional Development – Drug Free Schools Consortium – Educate America Consortium – In-service Credit Course Program – Math/Science Consortium – Teacher Induction – Reading Project – Technology Workshops

<i>Personnel Evaluation</i>	<i>Current Status</i>
	– Writing Assessment Project

<i>Curriculum</i>	<i>Current Status</i>
13. Instructional approach/teaching methods	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The primary instructional approach/teaching method is internet-deliverable educational courseware with follow-up assessments. Beyond the person-to-person assessments at MIU and some essays, the student would be using the computer 100% of the time. The instructional approach for all grade levels is to present printed content; present opportunities for responding to practice questions (as determined by the cyber facilitator); present a series of objective questions in the form of a test and present one or more essay questions that are to be corrected by the cyber facilitator. ▪ The MIU IV Distance Education Coordinator also plans to supplement the online courseware with lessons and activities.
14. Process for curriculum development (e.g., research based, purchased)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Purchased <i>A+nywhere Learning System (A+LS)</i> courseware from the American Education Corporation.
15. Evidence of modifications made to instructional program based on tracking performance measures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Lessons to be supplemented with additional lessons and activities created by the MIU IV Distance Education Coordinator as needed. ▪ The A+LS system provides an authoring system that will enable the Distance Education Coordinator to add website links, video and other modifications to lessons.
16. Approval process for curriculum, textbooks and materials	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Committee of district curriculum personnel was created by the board to evaluate software presented by third party vendors. ▪ The committee evaluated the curricula according to the management component, assessment and the extensiveness of the curriculum.
17. Course rigor and alignment of curriculum, instruction and testing to PA standards	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Documentation has been given by A+LS that the program is correlated to the PSSA. No documentation has been presented that it meets the PA standards. The <i>A+nywhere</i>

<i>Curriculum</i>	<i>Current Status</i>
	<p><i>Learning System</i> in grades 2 through 12 is primarily a supplementary program and does not provide by itself, the material and experiences to acquire the knowledge needed to complete the grades and courses for which it has titles. The only available material at this time covers math grades 1-12; reading 1-12; language usage 1-12, vocabulary 1-12; science 1-12 and some secondary social science courses.</p>
<p>18. Developmental appropriateness</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The method of content presentation does not match current best practices for teaching elementary students. The reading levels of some of the material presented to younger children is presented at an adult level while the material for a secondary student learning biology is over simplified.
<p>19. Ability to meet individual needs of students (e.g., support students having difficulty with curriculum, challenge gifted students)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The MIU IV Distance Education/Planning Coordinator can adapt the A+LS program to better meet the needs of each student by changing the number and type of test questions can be individualized (e.g., number of questions, multiple choice questions, fill in the blank questions). However, the curriculum system does not vary in the way it presents material. ▪ The MIU IV Distance Education Coordinator will be responsible for assessing the individual needs of students and altering the curriculum accordingly.
<p>20. Compliance with state and federal special education requirements</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The MIU IV Special Education Department staff will be available to the cyber school, as needed, to ensure that state and federal special education requirements are met.
<p>21. Provision of textbooks and supplies</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Students receive a computer, monitor, printer, scanner, ink cartridges, cabling, MS Office, ISP fees, Fortress security software, paper, pencils. ▪ The cyber school will provide students with all additional learning materials, as necessary (e.g., supplementary novels).

<i>Level of Interactivity</i>	<i>Current Status</i>
22. Ease of use of system interface	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ With the help of the MIU IV Distance Education Coordinator, students are oriented and trained in using the system. Once thoroughly trained, the system is intuitive.
23. Methods of student/teacher interaction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The MIU IV Distance Education Coordinator will be responsible for contacting all students via the phone or email, as needed. ▪ It is currently not planned that the facilitator will teach content but will help students with problems they may have with the system.
24. Frequency of student/teacher interaction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The MIU IV Distance Education Coordinator is currently planning to contact the students on a weekly basis. ▪ Contact will also be made on an as needed basis.
25. Methods of family/teacher interaction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The Midwestern Regional Virtual Charter School has an established orientation to provide parents with information on the school's expectations, policies and procedures. Parents are also trained on the computer system and programs (e.g., Microsoft Word-basics) and taught how to sign up for an email account.
26. Frequency of family/teacher interaction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ While there is still no clear pattern of contact with parents because the school year has just begun, the school encourages open communication with parents. ▪ Parents can contact the school to schedule conferences with school personnel, as needed.

<i>Level of Interactivity</i>	<i>Current Status</i>
27. Methods for teacher collaboration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> While there are no clear methods to facilitate teacher collaboration, the Distance Education Coordinator, the school's primary teacher, plans to share information and services with other education professionals.
28. Interactivity of instructional content	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There is a very low level of interactivity of instructional content. Students are given small amounts of material that are tightly directed to the topic at hand. After reading the material, students respond to practice questions and then to test questions.

<i>Student Development</i>	<i>Current Status</i>
29. Student services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Students have access to all student services provided by MIU IV (e.g., psychologists, health staff).
30. Opportunities for student socialization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Outside of the physical education requirement, there are currently no planned opportunities for student socialization.
31. Physical education requirement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To fulfill physical education requirements, students will participate in group organized physical activity. The school will provide a list of appropriate activities to the students (e.g., aerobics, dance, inter-mural-most districts allow them to participate), the student will then get approval for the activity and send in sheets to document their participation.
32. Extra-curricular activity offering	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Students will be able to participate in extra-curricular activities offered by their home school district. School staff will assist in making arrangements at the local school level.
33. Cyber charter school teacher – student ratio	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1:68 teacher to student ratio – (MIU IV Distance Education/Planning Coordinator).

<i>Technology Supporting Instruction</i>	<i>Current Status</i>
34. Adequacy of systems to support timely instructional delivery	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The <i>A+nywhere Learning System</i> in grades 2 through 12 is more of a supplementary program that is difficult to evaluate as a stand-alone program. The actual instructional content related to a specific grade or course is very basic and presented in a read/question/answer format. The system is very slow. There are long waits once any data are submitted. The system is unreliable. Sometimes you get two pictures when you should get one. More often, you get no pictures when you should get at least one. The audio works episodically.
35. System maintenance (e.g., servers)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> System maintenance will be provided by the American Education Corporation, the parent company of A+LS.
36. Technical support for students, parents and teachers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Distance Education Coordinator is the first line of technical support for students and their families. If additional technical support is necessary, the MIU IV's technical support staff will be available for the cyber school students, parents and staff.

<i>Technology Supporting Administration</i>	<i>Current Status</i>
37. Student information system to document information such as: name of family member supervising program, address and telephone number of home education site and evidence child has been immunized	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Student information will be documented through AEC, a software package.
38. Financial/budget system	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The MIU IV's computerized system will serve as this school's financial/budget system.
39. Human resources/payroll system	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The MIU IV's computerized system will serve as this school's human resources/payroll system.

<i>Relationship with Home School District</i>	<i>Current Status</i>
<p>40. Procedure for notifying home school district of newly enrolled students</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Students and parents are responsible for notifying the Superintendents of their home school districts that they will be enrolling in the Midwestern Regional Virtual Charter School. ▪ School personnel follow up to determine that contact was made with the student's home school district.
<p>41. Partnerships with local school districts</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ While there are currently no clearly established partnerships with local school districts, the Board of Trustees is comprised of 26 Superintendents from MIU IV's school districts.

Governance and Oversight

Evaluation Goal

The goal of the Governance and Oversight evaluation was to verify the existence of a viable cyber school governance structure.

Summary

The Board of Trustees of the Midwestern Regional Virtual Charter School's is a viable cyber school governance structure that consists of 26 superintendents from school districts within the Midwestern Intermediate Unit IV. Due to the current operational responsibilities of these educational administrators, it is unclear if they will have the time to play an active role in board meetings and in other sub-committees. In addition, the large size of the board will make board discussions and coming to a participative consensus on policy decisions difficult. The board has monthly meetings, special meetings and documented bylaws. The board members are committed to providing a cyber school service to school districts within the MIU IV.

Evaluation Criteria and Findings

The table below identifies the key criteria used to evaluate each cyber charter school and a description of how each school met these criteria.

<i>Governance and Oversight</i>	<i>Current Status</i>
<p>1. Documentation and description of school governance organizational structure</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The school's Board of Trustees is made up of a 26 member board that is responsible for managing the affairs of the school. The board also includes two non-voting members: a secretary and the executive director of the MIU IV. ▪ The Board of Trustees is led by a President, Vice President, Treasurer and Secretary. Every board officer is a Superintendent of each MIU IV district. ▪ The board has decided to contract out to the IU for a number of services (e.g., personnel, room rental). ▪ The Director of the MIU IV also serves as the director for the cyber charter school and is responsible for supervising the Distance Education/Planning Coordinator. ▪ The IU's Curriculum Coordinator and an Administrative Assistant support the Distance Education/Planning Coordinator.
<p>2. Experiential make-up of advisory board</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ All board members are superintendents within the MIU IV.

<i>Governance and Oversight</i>	<i>Current Status</i>
<p>3. Assessment of frequency and extent of input governance units have over instructional policy</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The board meets on a monthly basis. ▪ Based on meeting minutes, attendance at meetings ranges from 16-23 attendees and a quorum was reached at all of the seven regularly scheduled monthly meetings. ▪ According to board minutes, the board did not want to participate in software demonstrations. Instead, they wanted the staff to review software and develop a list of prices from each vendor.
<p>4. Clarity of legal and procedural requirements</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The board has documented bylaws.

Cost Analysis

Evaluation Goal

The goal of this evaluation was to analyze the cyber charter school costs. We have documented the results of our procedures in the table below.

Midwestern did not provide KPMG Consulting with a budget, but stated verbally that their estimated cost per student is \$2,000. KPMG Consulting does not believe this cost includes all expenses necessary to operate a cyber charter school. The estimated \$2,000 cost per student includes the student's courseware (A+LS), computer, monitor, printer, scanner, ink cartridges, cabling, MS Office, ISP fees, Fortress security software, paper and pencils. However, this figure does not capture essential operational costs such as a Chief Administrative Officer, teacher facilitators, repair technicians, technical support, and rent.