

# Flexible Virtual Learning Options Lead to District Turnaround in Terre Haute, Indiana

Vigo Virtual Success Academy, Vigo County School Corporation

## Learning Solutions

- EdOptions Academy

## District Profile

- 117 Students
- Grades 9 to 12
- 14,642 District Enrollment
- 54% Economically Disadvantaged
- 81% Caucasian
- 8% Multiracial
- 5% African American

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ROBIN SMITH  
VVSA Principal

## Challenge

Flash back to district reporting from just one year ago, and you’ll find that the Vigo County School Corporation (VCSC) in Terre Haute, Indiana, was hemorrhaging students—to the tune of 367 students choosing an outside virtual option during the 2018–19 school year alone. These students were exiting to take advantage of virtual learning options that the district wasn’t yet capable of offering. However, district and school leaders were seeing many of these students return, sometimes with no progress to show and no credits earned, just to wind up further behind and back in a classroom setting that wasn’t proving to be effective for them.

With the ultimate goal of helping all students succeed, no matter what their paths to graduation look like, school leaders set out to expand learning options. They decided to work with Edmentum’s EdOptions Academy virtual program to provide rigorous digital courseware paired with state-certified online teachers. Rounding out this partnership by installing its own school principal, mentors, guidance counselor, and social services, the district created Vigo Virtual Success Academy (VVSA) in August of 2019 to serve students in grades 9–12. As a new public option available to all high school students in the county, VVSA represented a critical step forward in earning back student enrollments, while still providing the accountability and resources available to students enrolled in the district’s traditional brick-and-mortar schools.

## Solution

Starting a new school and getting the word out to drive enrollment required intentional planning, partnership, and media outreach on the part of district and virtual academy administrators. In August 2019, all of the pieces came together at a town hall meeting

where approximately 130 interested Vigo County community members attended in hope of finding a better way to support learning opportunities outside of traditional options.

"It was a very touching and poignant evening for us all," recalled Robin Smith, VVSA principal. "We were all humbled by the fact that we'd created something where these folks are coming out to have their needs met. It's just grown very quickly, much to all of our amazement."

As VVSA began taking enrollments, the question of which students will thrive in the virtual academy setting continually came to the forefront. Prior to enrolling any student in a virtual course, VVSA leaders open their doors to parents and students for more in-depth conversations to ensure the right fit. The school serves a variety of student needs, including homebound or hospital-bound students, those who have experienced bullying or mental health concerns, and students who need a more flexible academic schedule like fifth-year seniors.

## Result

Just six months into this endeavor, the numbers already indicate that VCSC's online learning endeavor is a success. According to current enrollment reports, 117 students are now receiving virtual instruction at VVSA. Most of those students were from other virtual programs in need of additional support. But, success isn't just about the number of students attending the new virtual school; it's also about being able to provide consistent learning and ongoing support as students determine the right learning environment for them, whether that's entirely virtual, brick-and-mortar, or some combination of the two.

"It's been really fun to have the flexibility to truly develop a plan that we hope, and the student and

"This has become kind of a safe haven for parents," remarked Mrs. Smith. "So, we just sit and listen to them and then try to use what they're giving us to build the best plan." That plan could include an entirely virtual experience or a hybrid model leveraging brick-and-mortar services at the local alternative school, Booker T. Washington High School, in addition to online courses.

VVSA credits much of its success to the extra layer of accountability that students are provided. Two teachers at Booker T. Washington serve as virtual mentors or coaches making weekly phone calls or sending weekly emails to check in with students and provide help.

"One of the things we wanted to do from the beginning was to make sure that our virtual students had a place to go," commented Dr. Stacy Mason, executive director of secondary education for VCSC. "If [students] need resources, need help, want to talk to a counselor, want to talk to a mentor teacher—whatever the situation is—we have this available to [them]."

parent hopes, will work for them," noted Mrs. Smith. "[With our mentors and coaches] there's a face and a name and a phone number so they can get to us. The Edmentum EdOptions teachers are phenomenal in what they do with the coursework, and we're offering that mentoring/coaching piece here that just adds that extra layer of support."

In June 2021, Teacher-Success Coach Lindsay Wilhoyte was selected as Edmentum's Inspiring Teacher of the Year.



[Check out a short interview with her to learn more about Vigo's implementation from an educator perspective.](#)

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