News Debate: Virtual Ed

Do cyber schools make the grade?

Students in Caldwell, Idaho, can attend class in their pajamas! At Vallivue Virtual Academy, courses are taught online. Students work at home with parents, who serve as learning coaches. A certified teacher oversees the students' progress.

The cyber school was launched as a free option for students in kindergarten through grade 8 who have trouble succeeding in the district's traditional public school. Supporters of the program say that virtual schools help students avoid the social pressures that can interfere with learning. In addition, supporters argue, online courses provide kids with more focused instruction and course options than they can get in a typical school.

Not everyone gives cyber schools a passing grade, however. Some educators argue that online learning makes it hard for students to make friends. Many parents also feel that cyber schools put unrealistic time demands on them because they have to oversee their kids' daily work.

Are virtual schools a valid option? *Current Events* student reporters Sophia Platcow and Peter Brosnan each log in on a side.

Crash Course To Failure

Technology can benefit education, but it shouldn't take over education. Students who go to virtual schools will miss many of the benefits of being in a real school.

If kids attend school online, they will miss out on important social interactions. Payton Mcdonough, 13, a seventh grader from Glencoe, Ill., agrees. "I don't know how I could sit at a computer all day without actually interacting with my peers and teachers," he says.

In addition, virtual schools don't have enough structure. Students who take online courses can set their own schedules, which will cause problems for students who have trouble staying motivated.

Furthermore, online schooling puts stress on parents because they have to supervise what their kids do at home. Many parents have full–time jobs. How are they going to run their children's education, excel in their jobs, and take care of their other responsibilities at home?

Virtual schools will make it harder for students to learn and will put too much pressure on parents.

It's Time For Tech

In this ever–changing age of technology, it is important for students to learn to work in the virtual world.

Virtual learning does not need to replace classroom learning entirely, but it can help students work at their own pace. If students struggle with subjects, they can take those courses online and spend more time on them. Valerie VanSelous, a teacher from Hopewell Township, N.J., agrees. "Teachers, students, and parents need to embrace new technology and not be afraid of it. Offering different teaching aids just might be the key to unlocking a student's potential."

Virtual schools can also offer students much more flexible schedules. Students often juggle extracurricular activities, sports, and schoolwork, and cyber schools could help them manage everything.

Finally, attending virtual school can prepare students for college and for work after graduation. "We need to be responsible for working on our own," says Angela Goscilo, a senior from Pound Ridge, N.Y. "We need to develop technology skills that will help us in whatever we do. Getting an early start is a good idea."

Name: _____ Date: _____

1. What is Vallivue Virtual Academy?

    A a private school in Glencoe, Illinois
    B a charter school in Hopewell Township, New Jersey
    C a traditional public school in Caldwell, Idaho
    D a cyber school where courses are taught online

2. What argument is presented in this text?

    A an argument about prayer in schools
    B an argument about virtual schools
    C an argument about whether school should be year-round
    D an argument about what classes students should be required to take

3. Virtual schools are bad for kids. What evidence in the text supports this conclusion?

    A Virtual schools provide kids with more focused instruction than they get in a typical school.
    B Virtual schools provide kids with more course options than they get in a typical school.
    C Students who attend virtual schools can set their own schedules, which will cause problems for students who have trouble staying motivated.
    D Attending virtual schools can prepare students for college and work after graduation by training them to work independently.

4. Virtual schools are good for kids. What evidence in the text supports this conclusion?

    A Virtual schools help students avoid the social pressures that can interfere with learning.
    B If kids attend virtual schools, they will miss out on important social interactions.
    C Virtual schooling puts stress on parents because they have to supervise what their kids do at home.
    D A cyber school for students in kindergarten through eighth grade was launched in Caldwell, Idaho.

5. What is the main idea of this text?

    A Students in Caldwell, Idaho, can attend class in their pajamas.
    B Students who go to virtual schools will miss many of the benefits of being in a real school.
    C It is important for students to learn to work in the virtual world.
    D There are various arguments for and against virtual schools.

6. Read these sentences from the text.

"Not everyone gives cyber schools a passing grade, however. Some educators argue that online learning makes it hard for students to make friends. Many parents also feel that cyber schools put unrealistic time demands on them because they have to oversee their kids' daily work."

What does the statement "Not everyone gives cyber schools a passing grade" mean here?

     A Not everyone approves of cyber schools.
     B Not everyone has given cyber schools a test.
     C Not everyone has attended a cyber school.
     D Not everyone cares about students in cyber schools.

7. Read these sentences from the text.

"If kids attend school online, they will miss out on important social interactions. Payton Mcdonough, 13, a seventh grader from Glencoe, Ill., agrees. 'I don't know how I could sit at a computer all day without actually interacting with my peers and teachers,' he says.

"In addition, virtual schools don't have enough structure. Students who take online courses can set their own schedules, which will cause problems for students who have trouble staying motivated."

What word or phrase could best replace "in addition" at the beginning of the second paragraph?

     A First
     B Also
     C Instead
     D In contrast

8. Why does virtual schooling put stress on parents?

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9. What is different about the number of course options kids get in virtual schools compared to typical schools?

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10. Using evidence from the text, make an argument for or against virtual schools.

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