

Op ed

Open High School

by Tom Vander Ark February 2, 2011

Imagine "one-on-one tutoring for every student in every subject" and you get a picture of [Open High School](#), a virtual charter school serving 250 Utah students in ninth and tenth grade expanding to up to 1500 students 9-12 next year.

The name comes from a commitment to use open education resources (OER) where possible and to share what they develop.

The curriculum is hosted on MoodleRooms. Curriculum Director Sarah Westin draws content drawn from a variety of sources including OER Commons, Curriki, and a little Hippocampus. Some specialty courses are licensing from Florida Virtual School. Courses are leveled for different academic goals and to meet individual needs.

Teachers and students make extensive and integrated use of Twitter (#openhs). History teacher Jennifer Klein has conducted 'twistory,' teaching history in character on Twitter (and glows when she talk about it).

The faculty uses a variety of strategies for communicating with students including text, email, [gchat](#), [Skype](#), [Voicethread](#) and sometimes a good old-fashioned phone call.

Instructional tools include:

- [Vimeo](#): video sharing
- [Flicker](#): photo sharing
- [Glogster](#): poster maker
- [GeoGebra](#): math sketch pad
- [Oneeko](#) the screen sharing application
- [Grockit](#), [Brightstorm](#), and [Khan Academy](#): tutoring
- [Raptivity](#): science learning interactions
- [SimCEO.com](#): business simulation

Active collaboration takes place in Teacher Commons. To ensure that no one or nothing drops through the cracks, the faculty uses [HighRise](#) as a case management tool to track interventions and conversations related to individual students.

They just integrated the [Genius](#) student information system (but they miss their [BrainHoney](#) gradebook)

They are experimenting with a variety of fitness strategies. They plan to use something like Eric Whitacre's [Virtual Choir](#), a very cool mash up of individually recorded student videos.

More than 80% of the students live within 50 miles of Salt Lake, so the school community can gather monthly for social activities.

Each student is required to document at least 25 hours of community service.

Open High is highly personalized in terms of attention, partially personalized in terms of academic path, but not really competency-based—it's generally an age cohort model built around courses and semesters. The school remains somewhat constrained by year-end tests (rather than on demand end-of-course exams) and seat time requirements.

Director DeLaina Tonks is able to be very selective about her faculty with about ten applications for every position. The first wave drops off asked to produce and demonstrate a two-week instructional unit.

In another year, the 9-12 Open High platform will be robust enough to support not only their students and share with other blended and virtual schools nationwide. Founder David Wiley, board chair Robyn Bagley, and the faculty are making an important contribution to American education.

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