

VOLUME 1 • ISSUE 5 • OCTOBER 2026

ACELLUS[®] JOURNAL

INFORM • INSPIRE • UNITE

THIS ISSUE

THE DISTRICT THAT'S HIRING, NOT CUTTING

Acton-Agua Dulce has a waiting list, a 40% jump in student enrollment, and a 100% graduation rate. Here's how they did it.



■ **LEARNING STRATEGIES**
Executive Function Skills

■ **COMMUNITY VOICES**
Acellus Parent Insights

■ **THE FEATURE**
A Guide for Military-Bound Students

International Academy of Science

Welcome to the fifth issue of the Acellus Journal, the flagship monthly publication of the Acellus Learning System and the International Academy of Science. Every issue is built for you: the teachers, parents, students, administrators, and staff who make this community extraordinary. Here is what awaits you inside.

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ACELLUS JOURNAL

Inform · Inspire · Unite

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FROM THE LEADERSHIP

INSIGHTS AND PERSPECTIVES

WHY COURSE RIGOR MATTERS

By **Dr. Joshua Billings** · Executive Director, Acellus Academy

As we settle into a new school year, some parents have shared that Acellus coursework is challenging and covers advanced material. The pacing guides also limit how many lessons a student can complete in a day, making it impossible to rush through a course. It is no secret that Acellus courses are rigorous, and that is by design.

Acellus also requires a student to master each lesson before moving to the next. By contrast, in a traditional classroom the whole class moves on whether every student mastered the material or not. Students who haven't mastered the concepts, move forward with a gap in their understanding, and teachers are left building new material on top of an incomplete foundation.

By the time the student reaches college, these gaps have compounded. Nationally, about four in ten students who start college end up in at least one remedial course.¹ This is one reason why more than one in five college freshmen do not return for a second year.²

Dr. Roger Billings described the problem this way in his keynote earlier this year, "Imagine you are building a house. You get to the second floor and the floor sags. Now, what does our traditional education system do? It says, 'Let's reteach you second-floor construction.' But the floor still sags. Because the problem was never the second floor. The problem is a crack in the foundation."³

That is the vision behind Vectored Instruction®. In his words, "It goes down to the foundation. It finds the crack. And it fixes it. Then the student comes back up to the second floor, and this time, the floor holds."³

There are a lot of ways to measure a school, but the measure that matters most is what happens after graduation. Did the education hold up? When the student walked into a college classroom, were they ready? This August we contacted the families of Acellus Academy's Class of 2025 and asked how things are going. This is not a controlled study, and the families who answered chose to do so. But their responses provide interesting insight.

According to the National Center for Education Statis-



tics, the national first-year college GPA average is 2.6, between a C plus and a B minus.⁴ Of the families that responded to Acellus Academy's survey, the average first-year GPA was 3.58, nearly a full grade point above the national average.

Even more notable is how many of our graduates persisted into their second year of college. Of those attending two and four year institutions, 98.9 percent reported they are continuing their education this fall, 22 points above the national persistence rate reported by the National Student Clearinghouse.² And 87.2 percent of our college-bound graduates returned to the same institution, 18 points above the national rate.²

What makes these results special is where many of these students started. Families often come to Acellus because a student has fallen behind, with gaps in their learning, and is trying to regain their footing. Along the way, Vectored Instruction® met those students again and again, closing those gaps one concept at a time.

If you tuned in to Science Live last year, you heard Dr. Billings encourage students to "study hard." Some of the biggest rewards in life are hiding behind the biggest challenges, and education is no exception. So, students, if your coursework feels challenging, give it your best effort and keep going because your future is worth the effort.

Dr. Joshua Billings

Executive Director, Acellus Academy

1. National Center for Education Statistics, *High School Longitudinal Study of 2009*, Table O1 (2017)
2. National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, *Persistence and Retention Report* (2026)
3. Billings, R., "How Acellus Is Waking Up Education," Acellus National Administrator Conference keynote, 2026, reprinted in *Acellus Journal*, Vol. 1, Issue 1
4. National Center for Education Statistics, *High School Longitudinal Study of 2009*, Table Q3 (2016)

FIVE ISSUES IN

By **Jackson Hunt** · Editor, *Acellus Journal*

Five issues in, a few names and numbers have stuck with me more than the rest.

It's a strange experience. You forget how much accumulates when you're only ever looking at one issue at a time.

Issue 2 gave us Tyler Scott, walking across the stage in Kansas City after a cancer diagnosis nearly took his senior year from him. That same issue had Marty Kobza describing Lansing's turnaround in a single line I still think about: "We were losing our kids."

Issue 3 brought Eden Albelda, talking her way from a barn in Virginia to a Division 1 roster. It also brought Poplar School District, where a principal explained that the real value of the program wasn't academic at all. It was that it let struggling students get help without ever being singled out in front of the room.

Last issue gave us a student in Cape Town who graduated 18 months early because of a rule he never broke, and a school in Fremont where English Learners posted the single largest reading gain of any group in the school's data, 19.7 points, in one year.

None of that was inevitable. Somebody had to sit down, tell us those stories, and trust us enough to let us print them.

This issue keeps that going.

You'll meet Shepard McDonald, who earned a second-degree black belt and became an Eagle Scout before he'd even finished high school, then graduated at 16 and was sitting in a college classroom two months later.

You'll read about a rural district in Los Angeles County that was losing students and staring down budget cuts before it did something most of its neighbors weren't willing to do. Today it has a waiting list instead of a shrinking enrollment. One of their own team members summed it up in four words: you can't fake heart.

This issue's Feature looks at something concrete: the U.S. military's Tier I classification, and what it takes for a



diploma to earn it. Acellus Academy graduates hold that status today, the same standing as any traditional high school diploma, verified through the same accreditation review every other Tier I school goes through. The piece also follows graduates like Ray Grant, whose path from Acellus Academy into military service is part of what that classification actually looks like in practice.

None of this happens without the families, superintendents, and students willing to sit down and tell us something true. Five issues in, I'm more aware than ever that

"this magazine is really just a record of their willingness to talk to us. That's not something I take lightly."

I don't know if every reader connects with every story in here. Some of these stories are about resilience, some are about numbers on a graph, some are about a single sentence a kid said out loud for the first time. They don't all land the same way for everyone, and they're not supposed to.

But five issues in, I'm starting to understand what this magazine is actually for. It's not to convince anyone of anything. It's to make sure that whenever someone is ready to decide, there's something here solid enough to decide with.

That's the record. Five issues of it, and counting.

Jackson Hunt

Editor, Acellus Journal

LEARNING STRATEGIES

THE BRAIN'S COMMAND CENTER

DEVELOPING EXECUTIVE FUNCTION SKILLS FOR SELF-PACED LEARNERS

A student can be plenty capable and still stall out completely, not from a lack of intelligence, but a lack of the mental tools that make learning possible in the first place.

Picture a student staring at a math problem, then a phone notification, then the math problem again, then the ceiling. Twenty minutes later, nothing has been solved. The material wasn't too hard. The student wasn't lazy. What was missing had nothing to do with academic ability at all. It was executive function, and it may be the single most underrated skill set in a student's education.

Executive function is the brain's command center, the set of mental skills that let someone plan, start a task, stay on track, and adjust when things don't go as expected. Report cards rarely measure it directly, but it quietly shapes almost everything else: how a student handles a bad grade, stays organized, or manages their own time without someone standing over their shoulder.

These skills aren't fixed at birth. Like any skill, they develop over time and get stronger with practice.

THE ACELLUS CONNECTION

These skills matter in every classroom, but they matter even more in a self-paced learning environment. When a student sets their own schedule, works through video lessons independently, and checks their own understanding along the way, executive function isn't a nice bonus. It's the actual engine behind whether the student succeeds.

Self-paced students, including those learning through Acellus, are put in that position every day. Starting a lesson without being told to, managing time across subjects, catching a mistake before a teacher points it out, these are executive function skills at work, whether or not a student would ever call them that. Strengthening these skills doesn't just make self-paced learning easier. It builds habits that last well beyond any one course or platform.

There's no single official checklist for executive function, but breaking it down into specific, observable skills makes it much easier for parents and students to actually work with. Here are nine worth knowing, five of which tend to matter most for a student learning at their own pace.

WORKING MEMORY: THE BRAIN'S SCRATCHPAD

Working memory is the mental space that holds information just long enough to actually use it, not to keep it forever, just long enough to finish the thought. It's what lets someone dial a number they only just heard, keep a multi-step instruction straight from start to finish, or carry the thread of an idea from the beginning of a paragraph to its conclusion.

A student with strong working memory can juggle several pieces of information at once without dropping any of them mid-task. A student without it might follow



the first two steps of a set of directions perfectly and then completely lose the third, not from carelessness, but because the earlier information simply slipped away before it could be used.

TASK INITIATION: CLOSING THE GAP BETWEEN DECIDING AND DOING

Task initiation is what turns intention into motion. A student can fully understand an assignment, want to get it done, and still sit frozen in front of it for far longer than the task itself would ever take.

Students who are strong here treat the first move as low-stakes, jumping in somewhere, anywhere, rather than waiting to feel ready. Students who struggle here often know exactly what to do and simply can't make themselves begin, turning a ten-minute chore into something that eats an entire afternoon of avoidance before any actual work happens.

TIME MANAGEMENT: CALIBRATING AN INTERNAL SENSE OF DURATION

Time management isn't really about willpower, it's about accuracy. Some students have a fairly reliable internal sense of how long things take. Others are consistently, sometimes dramatically, wrong in one direction or the other.



A student with a well-calibrated sense of time will look at a big assignment and instinctively divide it into pieces spread across several days, well before the deadline closes in. A student without that calibration might assume a large project will only take an evening, and then discover with real panic that it needed a week, or the opposite: assume something modest will take forever and avoid starting it out of sheer dread.



FOCUS: HOLDING ATTENTION IN ONE PLACE

Focus isn't about ignoring distraction entirely, nobody manages that. It's about how long someone can keep coming back to the same task despite everything competing for their attention.

A student with strong focus can move through a long or tedious assignment as one continuous effort, occasionally distracted but quickly self-correcting. A student without it experiences a kind of mental drift, their attention keeps slipping sideways toward something else in the room or in their own head, and each small slip adds up until a short task has quietly stretched into something much longer.

SELF-MONITORING: CATCHING PROBLEMS WHILE THEY'RE STILL SMALL

Self-monitoring is the habit of checking your own understanding in real time instead of assuming it's fine. It's the difference between finishing a lesson and actually knowing whether that lesson landed.

A student strong in this area tends to notice, almost automatically, when something doesn't quite add up, an answer that seems off, an explanation that doesn't fully make sense, and pauses to sort it out before moving on. A student without this skill can walk away from an entire lesson feeling completely confident, only to be blindsided later by a test question that reveals a gap they never knew was there.



SIMPLE WAYS TO BUILD THESE SKILLS AT HOME

None of these are fixed traits a student either has or doesn't have. They're built the same way any skill is, gradually, through repeated small practice, and parents can support that without turning it into a formal intervention.

Working memory gets easier to manage with a simple habit: capture information the moment it arrives instead of trusting it to stay put on its own. A quick note or a voice memo does the job a brain often can't.

For task initiation, try shrinking the entry point down to something almost absurdly small. Agree to work on something difficult for only two or three minutes. Most resistance lives in the decision to begin, not in the task itself, and a small enough commitment tends to dissolve that resistance.

THE OTHER FOUR SKILLS

Four more skills round out the full picture, and they matter in any learning environment, not just a self-paced one. One keeps physical materials and mental information from sliding into disorder. Another allows a student to abandon an approach that isn't working and try something else instead of getting stuck. A third keeps a single disappointing outcome from spiraling into a much bigger emotional setback. And the last is the brief pause between wanting to do something and actually doing it, the difference between reaching for a distraction and choosing not to.

Time estimation improves when guessing becomes a habit. Before starting something, guess how long it will take out loud, then check the actual time afterward. Doing this repeatedly, and comparing the two numbers, trains a more reliable internal clock over months, not overnight.

Focus responds better to a controlled environment than to willpower in the moment. Removing a phone from the room entirely works far better than promising not to check it.

Self-monitoring builds through a short pause partway through a task, not just at the end, to ask whether things still make sense. Catching confusion in the middle of a lesson is far less costly than discovering it during an exam.



None of this requires specialized programs or a formal diagnosis to be worth trying. It requires consistency, and some patience with a set of abilities that never appears on a report card, despite shaping nearly every grade that does.

The student staring at that math problem, phone, math problem, ceiling, isn't missing intelligence. What's missing is a set of tools that can, in fact, be built. And for a student learning at their own pace, without someone standing over their shoulder to keep them on track, those tools aren't optional. They're the whole engine.



OPPORTUNITIES TO GET INVOLVED INITIATIVES OF ACELLUS

ACELLUS ACADEMY



Acellus Academy is a fully accredited online school serving K–12 students who need a flexible, personalized alternative to traditional education. Using the full Acellus curriculum, students learn at their own pace through engaging video-based lessons taught by qualified instructors.

With features like Vectored Instruction[®], Acellus identifies learning gaps and provides targeted support to help students achieve mastery before moving forward. Parents can easily monitor progress, while students have the freedom to learn from anywhere — whether at home, traveling, or balancing unique schedules and opportunities.

Acellus is ideal for families seeking a rigorous home-based education option, including students with medical needs, performance athletes, and those in rural areas with limited course access. Acellus students have gone on to earn college scholarships, complete dual enrollment programs, and graduate early.

Enrollment is open year-round. To learn more, visit [Acellusacademy.com](https://www.AcellusAcademy.com) or [Acellus.com](https://www.Acellus.com), or call (866) 684-6127 to speak with an enrollment advisor.

ACELLUS FOR SCHOOLS

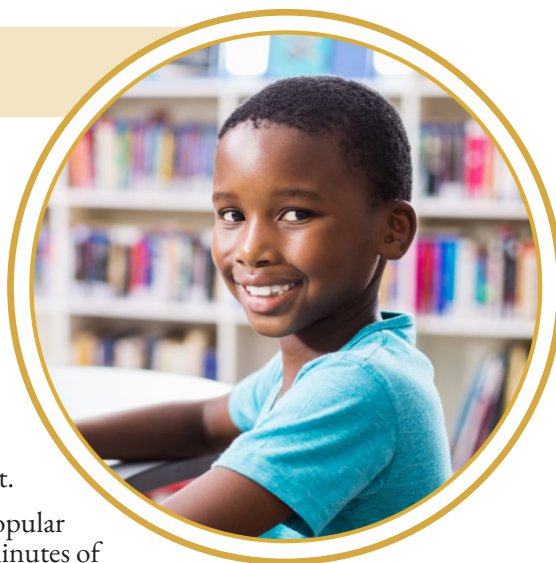
CLASSROOM-READY IMPLEMENTATION

Acellus equips public and private schools with a flexible, standards-aligned platform designed for in-classroom and blended learning. Schools use it for core instruction, intervention, credit recovery, special education, gifted programs, or STEM — integrating seamlessly without disrupting schedules.

When your school signs up, you can expect:

- Fast Onboarding — Quick setup, staff training, and dedicated support.
- Flexible Classroom Models — Including Adaptive Hybrid, the popular 40/20 blended model (40 minutes adaptive digital instruction + 20 minutes of team learning with teacher-led collaboration and higher-order activities).
- Teacher Empowerment — Real-time dashboards and automated tools that free educators to focus on mentoring and instruction.
- Proven Outcomes — Strong gains in engagement, mastery, and test scores across diverse populations. Acellus complements strong teaching, helping schools differentiate instruction and keep every student on track for graduation.

To learn more, contact partnerships@Acellus.com or visit <https://www.Acellus.com/schools/>.



BEYOND ACELLUS

GRADUATE SPOTLIGHT

FROM HOMESCHOOL TO HONORS

*He graduated at 16. Two months later,
he was in college.*

THE BEGINNING

Shepard McDonald was the middle child — sandwiched between two older brothers and two younger sisters — and he learned early how to hold his own. By the time his family began looking for something different in their approach to education, he had already earned a second-degree black belt in Shotokan karate, studied piano for years, and was well on his way to becoming an Eagle Scout.

On January 8, 2024, Shepard and his two younger sisters began their homeschooling journey through Acellus Academy. He was 14 years old.

WHY ACELLUS

For his mother, the decision came down to one thing: she wanted Shepard to take ownership of his education. She wasn't looking for a program that would simply deliver content — she wanted something that would require him to manage his time, master material before moving forward, and develop the independence that college and life would eventually demand.

"One of the greatest benefits of Acellus for Shepard was learning how to take ownership of his education," she says. "Because he was responsible for managing his own schedule, completing assignments independently, and staying on track, he developed the self-discipline and time management skills that are so important for college success."

THE EXPERIENCE

Shepard genuinely enjoyed the platform — the video instruction, the ability to read lesson text, use subtitles, and learn in the format that worked best for him. His mother



Shepard McDonald, Acellus Academy Class of 2025, graduated with Honors at 16.

QUICK FACTS

NAME Shepard McDonald	FIRST SEMESTER GPA Straight A's
FROM Vallejo, California	CURRENTLY Full-time student, Solano College — Kinesiology
GRADUATED FROM Acellus Academy, November 10, 2025 (Honors)	SUMMARIZED ACELLUS IN ONE WORD "Prepared."
AGE AT GRADUATION 16	

recalls the lessons feeling focused and substantive, teaching what she describes as the "meat and potatoes" of each subject rather than filling time.

Vectored Instruction® made a particular impression on the family. Knowing the program would identify learning gaps and provide targeted instruction before letting him move forward gave them confidence that Shepard was truly mastering concepts, not just completing assignments.

"Shepard was often excited to share the new things he learned each day," his mother says.

The family also leaned on the Graduation Plan feature, which gave them a clear picture of exactly which courses were needed and let them challenge Shepard with additional coursework while keeping graduation on the horizon. That flexibility gave the family room to accelerate his pace whenever he was ready for more.



Eagle Scout earned June 2025 — a distinction held by fewer than 4% of all Scouts since 1911.

THE RESULTS

In June 2025, at 15 years old, Shepard became his family's first Eagle Scout — a distinction earned by fewer than four percent of all Scouts since 1911.

Five months later, on November 10, 2025, he graduated from Acellus Academy with honors. He was 16.

FROM HIS MOM

"College readiness is about more than grades. It is about developing the skills, discipline, and confidence needed to succeed independently. In our experience, Acellus helped Shepard build those qualities, and we have seen the results firsthand."

— Proud Mother of Shepard McDonald

Two months after that, he enrolled full-time at Solano College as a Kinesiology major, carrying 15 units — well above the 12 typically considered full-time. He finished his first semester with straight A's in college-level English, Biology, Statistics, and Kinesiology.

He has continued taking college courses over the summer, while working about 20 hours a week at Ace Hardware and serving in children's ministry at his church every week.

"What has impressed us most is not only his academic success, but his ability to balance multiple responsibilities at such a young age," his mother says. "The flexibility of Acellus played a significant role in making this possible."

WHAT'S NEXT

Shepard plans to complete his Associate's degree in Kinesiology at Solano College before transferring to pursue a Bachelor's degree in Exercise Science, with a concentration in Clinical Exercise and Rehabilitation. From there, he hopes to earn his Doctor of Physical Therapy degree and become a physical therapist.

When he isn't studying, working, or at the gym, he's usually with family and friends, playing volleyball, or serving at church.



Shepard McDonald closes out his Acellus Academy journey as a Class of 2025 Honors graduate.

SCHOOLS THAT SHINE

ACELLUS® IN ACTION

CHANGING DECLINE INTO DEMAND

TURNAROUND IN RURAL CALIFORNIA

Enrollment is up 40%, with a 100% graduation rate. Here's how.



QUICK FACTS

SCHOOL

Acton-Agua Dulce Unified School District (AADUSD)

LOCATION

Acton, CA

POWERED BY:

Acellus®

STUDENT BODY:

~1,000+ students across 3 campuses (elementary, middle, and Vasquez High School)

PROGRAM GROWTH:

180 students in Year 1, has since doubled

KEY CONTACTS:

Dr. Eric Sahakian
Superintendent

Dr. Paula Chamberlain
Director of Educational Services

Alexa Lepp
Teacher on Special Assignment (TOSA)

Sean Ghafourian
Lead Teacher

Tucked away in northern Los Angeles County, Acton-Agua Dulce Unified School District (AADUSD) serves just over 1,000 students across three campuses: an elementary, a middle, and Vasquez High School. Facing post-pandemic headwinds, declining enrollment, and severe budget constraints, the district established a virtual academy to meet shifting family needs.

However, Teachers on Special Assignment (TOSAs) Alexa Lepp and Sean Ghafourian quickly realized that the initial platform fell short of their expectations. Recognizing their students needed a far more dynamic solution, the team began searching for alternatives.

AADUSD was first introduced to Acellus after attending the California School Boards Association conference, where board member Brianna Taxoni learned of the platform. That recommendation was soon reinforced when former Pasadena administrator Dr. Marisa Sarian reconnected with Dr. Paula Chamberlain, AADUSD's Director of Educational Services, to champion the program.

"Our goal at the district level was to build an infrastructure that eliminates barriers to learning," said Alexa Lepp. "Integrating Acellus allowed us to offer a full spectrum of customized learning paths, giving every student in our community equal access to a rigorous, flexible public education."

THE SHIFT TO ACELLUS

AADUSD secured grant funding that year to pilot Acellus with 25 credit-recovery students who were severely at risk of not graduating. Moving away from passive lectures, the platform's Vectored Instruction® provided dynamic re-teaching and scaffolding. Exploring the course materials for the first time, Sean and Alexa were immediately struck by the high quality and engaging format of the video lessons.

"I remember the first time Sean and I watched one of the videos as if we were students. We thought, 'Are we watching the History Channel?'" recalled Lepp.



Dr. Eric Sahakian
Superintendent



"We couldn't get the trial students to stop working. We literally had to tell them to take a break because they were addicted to working toward their goals and processing the information."

"When we got survey results back from those students, that's what we pitched to our board: these kids really love Acellus, and it's something we have to try for all of our students. When we gave our board presentation, they said, 'All right, let's try it.'"

Now fully backed by the district, Lepp and her team were able to integrate Acellus into their virtual academy — and haven't looked back since.

DATA-DRIVEN IMPACT & MEASURABLE SUCCESS

Once AADUSD fully adopted Acellus across credit recovery, schedule conflicts, blended learning, and independent study, the district saw immediate, dramatic improvements across all major metrics. Course completion rates jumped from 60% to 100%, directly propelling the district's graduation rate from 92% to a perfect 100%.

"Our preliminary internal data showed major improvements," noted Lepp. The academic gains extended to state testing, where Vectored Instruction® drove double-digit growth in foundational subjects. District ELA proficiency scores climbed from 50% to 53%, outperforming neighboring districts. Daily absenteeism in virtual and hybrid cohorts also plummeted.

"Attendance issues can be a major challenge in virtual and homeschool environments, which directly impacts ADA funding," shared Lepp. "Out of a group of 40 kids, I used to average around 10 absences a day. Now, I might have one student absent because of a specific personal situation. I went from never having perfect attendance to having near-perfect attendance."

With program waiting lists forming quickly, student engagement turned into a key self-motivator as students worked diligently to keep their spots.

GROWTH TRAJECTORY & LEADERSHIP SUPPORT

While regional peers battle declining enrollment and forced budget cuts, AADUSD's program launched with 180 students in its first year and has since doubled. At Vasquez High School alone, the overall student population grew from 320 to 450 students.

Central to this turnaround was leadership's decision to back Acellus fully, not as a pilot on the side, but as the district's actual infrastructure, championed by Director of Educational Services Dr. Paula Chamberlain and Superintendent Dr. Eric Sahakian.

BY THE NUMBERS

Graduation Rate:
92% → 100%

Course Completion Rate:
60% → 100%

Daily Absences per 40 students:
~10 → ~1

Students at Vasquez High School:
320 → 450



Director of Educational Services
Dr. Paula Chamberlain.

This commitment enabled the virtual & hybrid learning program to expand its team to five full-time equivalent educators. All while neighboring districts are having to trim their teaching staff, Acton-Agua is actively expanding theirs.

For Superintendent Dr. Eric Sahakian, that investment reflects a broader philosophy about what public education owes families. "Public education succeeds when families feel heard and supported," he said. "By building a robust virtual option in-house, we gave local families a reason to stay in our district rather than seeking outside alternatives — proving that rural public schools can lead the way in modern educational choice."

Students in neighboring high school districts are now actively seeking interdistrict transfers to enroll at AADUSD specifically for the Acellus program, reversing regional enrollment trends.

"I grew up in a neighboring high school district and have friends who work there, so we bounce ideas off each other," shared Alexis Graber, a TOSA team member. **"A lot of students are transferring from that district to ours specifically for the Acellus program."**



Class of 2026 graduating seniors returning to the Meadowlark Elementary campus for their Senior Walk, a tradition where they return to the campuses where their educational journeys began.

THE FOUR PILLARS OF IMPLEMENTATION & INCLUSIVE SUPPORT

To maximize reach, Lepp's team structures Acellus around four pillars: credit recovery, resolving schedule conflicts, blended learning, and full-time independent study. Tools like the Writing Tutor support credit recovery, while online AP and CTE courses resolve scheduling overlaps so students don't miss campus events.

"Kids still want the traditional high school experience: going to football games, hanging out at lunch, and joining clubs. Our blended model bridges that gap," explained Lepp. The platform's differentiated instruction also allows teachers to meet students at vastly different baseline skill levels.

"In my last year teaching fourth grade at an elementary school in Los Angeles USD, 18 of my 24 students were performing at a first-grade level," reflected Alexis. "I look at Vectored Instruction® now and think, 'If only I had this back then.' Target vectored lessons help bring students up to grade level much faster without needing six



Vasquez High School Class of 2026 graduation.

hours of small-group instruction every day."

"Coming from a high school math background, it seems like a game-changer that students can start at vastly different levels and all reach grade-level proficiency," added Chrissy Ciufu, a TOSA team member. "It provides clear data for SSPT or IEP meetings to show parents that an intervention is actually working."

This framework is equally vital for newcomer English Language Learners accessing Spanish coursework and foster youth needing stability across changing living arrangements.

"There are so many students who simply wouldn't have graduated without this option," highlighted Lepp. "When living arrangements change, foster youth are often forced to switch schools. Because our program is online, they can maintain interdistrict transfers, stay enrolled with us, and finish their education in a stable environment."

THE REAL TAKEAWAY

Acellus supplied the framework, the scaffolding, and the data tracking behind these results. What AADUSD's team adds is that the platform only worked because they built a real culture around it, not instead of it.

"Beyond the platform itself, we focus heavily on the team behind it. You can't fake heart,"

reflected Lepp. "Acellus as a program is incredible, but how you utilize tools is just as important. It's about finding a way to build a supportive culture."

With graduation rates at 100%, waiting lists to get in, and a program that's doubled in size, Acton-Agua Dulce Unified School District has turned a post-pandemic challenge into a model other rural districts are now trying to replicate.



AADUSD Teacher on Special Assignment (TOSA) department left to right: Christine Ciufu, Alexa Lepp, Alexis Graber, and Sean Ghafourian.

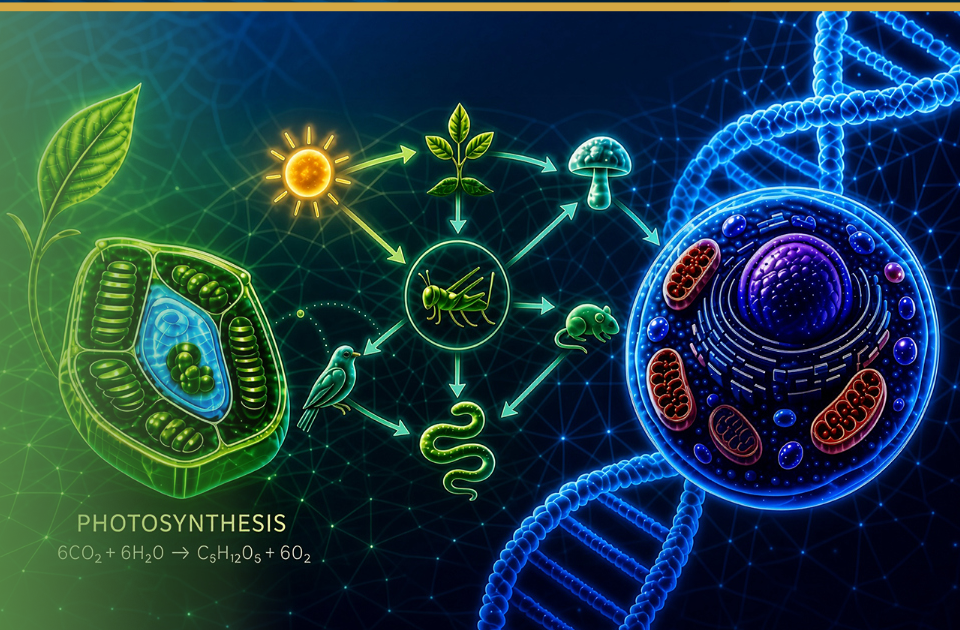
COURSE CATALOG

NEW & UPDATED

AP BIOLOGY

**NOW AVAILABLE ON THE
ACELLUS LEARNING SYSTEM**

College-level biology, from
molecules to ecosystems — built
for mastery



ABOUT THE COURSE

Every living thing on Earth — from a single bacterium to a blue whale — runs on the same molecular machinery. Understanding that machinery — and how it sustains every living system, from a single cell to an entire ecosystem — is the work of AP Biology. The newest Advanced Placement offering from Acellus gives students a full college-level biology course: rigorous, lab-rich, and built lesson by lesson around the College Board's AP Biology framework.

The course opens by handing students the map. An orientation unit introduces the four Big Ideas that organize all of AP Biology — Evolution, Energetics, Information Storage and Transmission, and Systems Interactions — along with the six science practices that the AP exam rewards: explaining concepts with evidence, analyzing visual models, designing investigations, representing and analyzing data, and constructing scientific arguments. From the first week, students know exactly what mastery looks like and how they will be asked to demonstrate it.



COURSE DETAILS

COURSE TITLE

AP Biology

SUBJECT AREA

Science

GRADE LEVEL

High School (Advanced Placement)

LENGTH

Full Year · 175 Lessons

UNITS

9

ASSESSMENT

Lesson Practice, Unit Exams,
Mid-Term Exam, Final Exam

SKILLS DEVELOPED

Explaining biological concepts with evidence, analyzing visual representations and models, designing scientific investigations, constructing and interpreting graphs, performing statistical analysis, scientific argumentation

WHAT THE COURSE COVERS

From there, the course builds the way life itself does — from the bottom up. Students begin with the chemistry of life: water, macromolecules, and the enzymes that drive every reaction in a cell. They move into cell structure and transport, then into cellular energetics, tracing every electron of photosynthesis and cellular respiration. The middle units take on cell communication and the cell cycle — including what happens when regulation fails and cancer begins — followed by heredity and gene expression, from Mendel's crosses to modern biotechnology. The final units widen the lens to whole populations and ecosystems — population genetics, community interactions, biodiversity, and the flow of energy through the living world.

What sets the course apart is how much of it students do rather than read. More than two dozen virtual labs and simulations run throughout — measuring catalase enzyme activity, tracking osmosis and photosynthesis rates, observing the

phases of mitosis, running virtual corn crosses, editing genes with CRISPR, and modeling population growth and biodiversity in ecosystems. Each lab puts a science practice to work on real data, so the analytical skills the AP exam demands are rehearsed dozens of times before exam day ever arrives.



WHY IT MATTERS

Few subjects touch a student's life as directly as biology. It is the science of their own body — how cells turn a meal into energy, how an immune system fights infection, why traits run in families — and the science of the living world around them. It is also the science of the decades ahead: gene editing, personalized medicine, emerging diseases, and the health of ecosystems will shape the world these students inherit, and understanding how life works is what makes those questions navigable. AP Biology gives Acellus students that understanding at real depth, along with the habits of a scientist — reasoning from evidence, interpreting data, and testing claims against the living world. For students drawn toward medicine, research, or the life sciences, this is where that path begins.



INSTRUCTOR SPOTLIGHT

Science

Andy Robinson brings the perspective of a working scientist to AP Biology. With a degree in the life sciences and a background in laboratory research, he knows the material of this course the way only someone who has practiced it can.

That experience shapes how he teaches — pairing the precision of the lab with a patient, approachable style that makes college-level biology feel within reach for every Acellus student.

RAISING A SCHOLAR: CATHY WILDER ON NAVIGATING DUAL ENROLLMENT AT AGE 11

From an early age, Cathy Wilder knew her son William was different. When she began looking into local preschools, she quickly realized traditional classrooms wouldn't match his pace.

"When we asked what their 4-year-olds were doing, they said, 'We're learning ABCs.' We told them William was already starting to read," Cathy recalled. "They suggested he could help out in class, and I said, 'We're not going to pay you for a 4-year-old to help teach.'"

Driven by a natural passion for learning and his mother's active guidance, the now 11-year-old is achieving milestones that most high schoolers only dream of. William's impressive 1330 on the SAT wasn't earned by luck; it was built on the strong foundation Acellus laid for him, paired with his mother's hands-on support every step of the way.

THE EARLY YEARS: "ACCIDENTAL" ACCELERATION

Long before test scores and college planning entered the picture, the Wilder family's path with Acellus began as a simple search for early engagement. Both of Cathy's children started with Acellus at a young age—William at four and his sister, Eden, at six. Initially, Cathy didn't realize just how quickly her son would move through his coursework.

"He liked the idea that he was on a computer going to school, and he did it whenever he wanted," Cathy said. "He loved it, so he did it all the time. That allowed him to get ahead purely by accident—we didn't realize how far along he was until he was 6."

Approaching his lessons almost like a video game, William's enthusiasm drove rapid progress. Realizing the trajectory he was on, Cathy sat down with her six-year-old to map out a clear roadmap for his future.

"I told him, 'William, if you continue at this rate, you could graduate at 12,'" Cathy recalled. "We laughed about it, but we made a plan and stuck with it."



OVERCOMING DOUBTS & STANDARDIZED TEST SUCCESS

To gauge his readiness for higher education, Cathy introduced paper practice SATs when William was nine—and he scored a 980 on his first baseline attempt.

Still, Cathy couldn't shake a worry common among homeschool parents. "To be honest, I was always scared," she admitted. "What if Acellus is just too easy and he wouldn't be able to compete in a real classroom?"

Those doubts reached a peak the morning she dropped her 11-year-old off for his first official exam alongside high school upperclassmen. "I actually had tears leaving my 11-year-old in a place he'd never been to take an exam with 17-year-olds," Cathy recalled.

Her anxiety turned to relief when William scored 1250 on that first test. Motivated by the result, he kept studying and eventually raised his score to an extraordinary 1330.

DUAL ENROLLMENT AT GEORGIA STATE

Holding an extraordinary SAT score with only two required high school courses remaining, William was ready for his next challenge. For Cathy, dual enrollment offered both an academic step up and a practical advantage.



William, Cathy, and Eden Wilder in Marrakesh, Morocco.

"If I can get a year of college for free, I'm going to take it," Cathy said. "Because we padded his schedule at Acellus with extra courses, he only had one English and one math course left for graduation. Dual enrollment was the logical way to complete high school while starting college."

The family chose Georgia State University, where William transitioned into live college instruction—learning to navigate professor interactions while drawing on the strong study habits Acellus instilled.

THE PARENT'S ROLE: STRUCTURE, SUPPORT & REAL LIFE

While Acellus provided the curriculum, Cathy emphasizes that online learning is never hands-off. Success demanded clear boundaries and active involvement.

"If you do your part as a parent and don't just use Acellus as a babysitter, students will do well," Cathy said. "Kids get distracted, so I put parental controls on to block the internet during school time. You have to hold them accountable."

That accountability meant requiring 90% or higher on module retakes—yet Cathy balanced high standards with a normal childhood. Outside of college classes, William plays piano, studies cello, earns belts in Tang Soo Do, and travels with his family.

"Outside of school, he's a typical 11-year-old," Cathy shared. "Yes, he's doing high-level work, but he's still doing the silly stuff an 11-year-old boy does, like jumping off a crazy wall. It's about building in rewards so he still gets to enjoy life."

LOOKING AHEAD & REDEFINING THE MOLD

Today, Cathy has become an informal mentor for other families navigating non-traditional education, frequently answering questions from parents on social media who are curious about how to support their own accelerated learners. Her advice remains simple: trust your child's capabilities, but stay actively involved in their journey.

As William continues his dual-enrollment classes at Georgia State, the Wilder family is embracing the unique adventure of raising a college student who hasn't yet reached his teenage years. For Cathy, letting go of traditional school norms has proven that learning doesn't have to fit inside a standard box.

"Parents are often afraid, thinking about traditional high school milestones like prom that you forget after 10 years anyway," Cathy reflected. "We've been conditioned to think that's the only way, but it isn't."

When you let kids learn at their own speed and give them the right support, there's no limit to what they can achieve."

— Cathy Wilder



Cathy and William Wilder in Casablanca, Morocco.

JOIN OUR TEAM

CAREER OPPORTUNITIES

WORK AT THE HEART OF EDUCATION INNOVATION

The International Academy of Science is a mission-driven organization that believes every student deserves access to an excellent education. Our team is made up of educators, engineers, designers, and support professionals who share that belief and work every day to make it real. Working at IAS means working somewhere where the mission is the reason — not a paragraph in an employee handbook.

View a full list of open positions and apply at: kccareermakers.com/jobs/.

CURRENT OPEN POSITIONS

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COLLEGE DEGREE REQUIRED, ON-SITE

This is an exciting opportunity for Mathematics Majors in the Kansas City area. We are looking for driven individuals passionate about Math looking to start a career.

FRONT END DEVELOPER

ON-SITE

Build beautiful, easy-to-use applications and interfaces. Use HTML, CSS, JavaScript, and tools like React to create user-focused, high-performance web applications and work with a creative team on exciting projects.

ENGLISH MAJORS

COLLEGE DEGREE REQUIRED, ON-SITE

This is an exciting opportunity for English Majors in the Kansas City area. We are looking for driven individuals passionate about English looking to start a career.

COLLEGE GRADUATES

COLLEGE DEGREE REQUIRED, ON-SITE

This is an exciting opportunity for college graduates in the Kansas City area. We are looking for driven individuals looking to start a career.

CALL CENTER REPRESENTATIVE

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In this role, you'll provide personalized guidance, encouragement, and resources to parents homeschooling their children through an innovative online learning program.

UNDERSTANDING TIER I: A GUIDE FOR MILITARY-BOUND STUDENTS

What the military looks at before a recruit ever takes a test, and what still has to be earned after

Ask high school students what it takes to join the military, and most will name the same few things: stay fit, stay healthy, stay out of trouble. Few will mention school. Yet education is the first thing the Department of Defense evaluates, and it shapes a recruit's options at every step that follows.

HOW THE MILITARY SORTS RECRUITS

Before any test or interview, the military checks a recruit's education and places them in one of three tiers. The system exists for a practical reason: education is one of the most reliable predictors of who completes a term of service.¹

WHAT PUTS A GRADUATE IN TIER I

Graduating from an accredited high school earns Tier 1, the military's top education category. It doesn't matter whether the student learned in a classroom or online. Homeschool graduates who meet the military's criteria qualify as well.



The gate is accreditation. Recruiting guidance accepts diplomas from online and virtual programs that are state approved or accredited by a recognized accrediting body. Without accreditation, the same diploma may be placed in Tier 2.¹ Partner districts that use Acellus award their own diplomas, which carry the district's standing. Students should know who accredits their school and keep proof on hand, since a recruiter may ask for it.

Two things have to be true for a student to serve: the diploma has to count, and the education behind it has to hold up under testing.

WHAT STILL HAS TO BE EARNED

Tier status opens the door. It doesn't walk a candidate through it.

KNOWING THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE TIERS

TIER III

Rarely accepted

- ✓ No diploma or alternative credential

TIER II

Accepted in limited numbers

- ✓ GED or certificate of attendance
- ✓ Diploma from an unaccredited program

Annual caps: ~10% Army, 5% Marines.
Higher AFQT expected, usually 50+.

TIER I

Most recruits enter here

- ✓ Diploma from an accredited or state-approved high school
- ✓ Accredited online programs
- ✓ Qualifying homeschool graduates
- ✓ GED plus 15+ college credits

REQUIREMENTS TO ENLIST

- ✓ **Age within the branch's limits**
17 is the minimum, with parental consent; the maximum varies
- ✓ **U.S. citizen or lawful permanent resident**
- ✓ **Meets medical and physical fitness standards**
- ✓ **Meets moral character standards**
- ✓ **High school diploma or an accepted alternative credential**
- ✓ **Qualifying AFQT score on the ASVAB**

Every applicant takes the Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery (ASVAB). Four of its sections (arithmetic reasoning, mathematics knowledge, word knowledge, and paragraph comprehension) make up the AFQT score, a percentile from 1 to 99, measured against a national sample of young adults, that decides basic eligibility.² For Tier 1 applicants, the Army, Navy, and Marine Corps set the minimum at 31, and the Air Force and Coast Guard ask for more.³

Clearing the minimum isn't the same as being competitive. Scores of 93 and above, Category I, belong to the top 7 percent of test takers.² The Department of Defense also requires that at least 60 percent of each year's recruits score 50 or higher, so the services are competing for the upper half of the scale.⁴

That's where a strong score pays off. Each military job sets its own minimums, drawn from combinations of ASVAB sections, and the most sought-after fields set the highest: intelligence, cyber operations, nuclear propulsion, aviation, medicine, and languages. High scorers are also first in line for guaranteed training in a chosen field, the largest enlistment bonuses, and, in some branches, advanced rank at entry.³

A recruit who scores in the 30s is offered a short list. A recruit who scores in the 90s chooses from nearly the entire catalog. Because so much rests on basic math and reading, those are the skills worth strengthening early.

Education is also only part of the picture. A 2020 Department of Defense study found that only about 23 percent of Americans ages 17 to 24 were eligible to serve without a waiver.⁵ A diploma alone isn't a guarantee. In a 2010 study, the Education Trust reviewed ASVAB results for roughly 350,000 high school graduates and found that nearly one in four fell short of the minimum score for every branch.⁶



U.S. Army photo by Spc. Brendon Donahue.

FOR STUDENTS AIMING HIGHER

Tier 1 status isn't the ceiling. Officers need a four-year degree and typically earn a commission through one of three paths:

- **ROTC**, which pairs college with military leadership training and offers competitive scholarships.
- **Officer Candidate School**, which is open to those who have already finished a degree.
- **The five service academies**, including West Point, the Naval Academy, and the Air Force Academy. They commission graduates directly and remain among the most selective schools in the country.

New officers are commissioned as second lieutenants or ensigns, depending on the service.



U.S. Army Reserve photo by Staff Sgt. Ken Scar.

WHERE ACELLUS ACADEMY STANDS

Acellus Academy is accredited by ACS WASC, the Accrediting Commission for Schools of the Western Association of Schools and Colleges, an accrediting agency recognized by the Department of Defense. Its graduates enter as Tier 1, like graduates of any other accredited high school. Alumni have gone on to enlist, join ROTC programs, and receive service academy appointments.

The Acellus Science Fair also takes part in the Naval Science Awards Program, which the Office of Naval Research runs. The program's judges present the Naval Science Award to top high school projects.

THE BOTTOM LINE

A diploma from an accredited school gets a student through the first gate. Everything after that, whether it's a strong ASVAB score, a chosen job, or a commission, is built in the years before graduation.



Acellus Academy student presented with the Naval Science Award at the 2026 Acellus Science Fair.

MEET RAY GRANT

Entering the Military After Online School

Ray graduated from Acellus Academy and turned that into a two-year early commissioning program at Valley Forge Military Academy and College. He started with a four-day mini-camp to prepare incoming cadets, then completed a full month at basic camp.

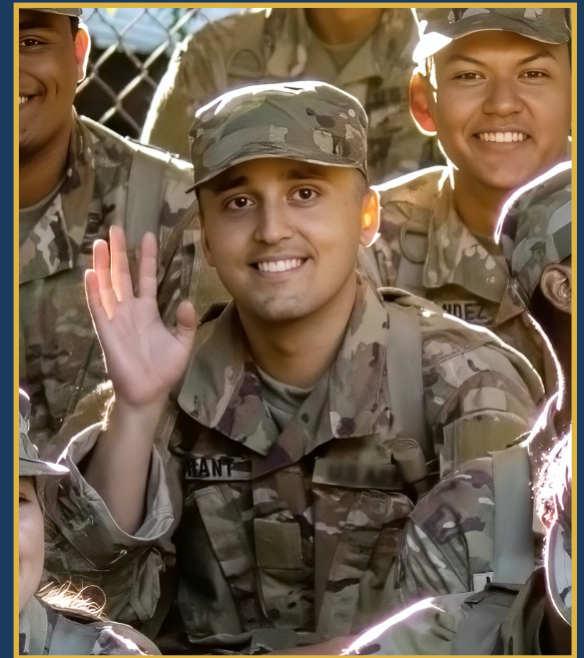
"It's because of Acellus that I was able to achieve a 4.0 GPA... and even scored a 94 on my ASVAB," Grant said. He credits the support of his mother, his brother, and a group of friends who followed the journey alongside him.

His message to students weighing the same path:

"You can do anything. Acellus is always here to help, and I'm very grateful to them."

GPA
4.0

AFQT
94th-percentile



1. DoD Instruction 1145.01, Qualitative Distribution of Military Manpower (2013, updated 2024).
2. Official ASVAB, "Understanding ASVAB Scores," officialasvab.com.
3. Official ASVAB, "Enlistment Eligibility," officialasvab.com.
4. Congressional Research Service, *Defense Primer: Active*

5. Component Enlisted Recruiting (2024).
5. DoD Office of People Analytics, *Qualified Military Available Study 2020* (2022).
6. The Education Trust, *Shut Out of the Military* (2010).
7. Valley Forge Military College, "Army ROTC Early Commissioning Program," vfmcollege.edu.

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