



Eighth Grade Access to Algebra I: A Study of Virtual Algebra

What Is the Virtual Algebra Study?

Endorsed by the Maine Department of Education Commissioner Susan Gendron and sponsored by the U.S. Department of Education, the Virtual Algebra study gives participating schools a free section of Algebra I taught by highly qualified, online teachers during the 2008-2009 or 2009-2010 school year. Up to 60 schools in the state of Maine will have the opportunity to participate *at no cost* in this state of the art, online project. Virtual Algebra is aimed at expanding access to eighth graders who are ready to take Algebra I but cannot do so because they attend schools in areas (e.g., small schools in rural locations) that do not offer the course until high school. The study will examine the impact of having online access to an Algebra I course in eighth grade—in terms of math achievement and later course-taking patterns in high school.

Who Is Conducting the Virtual Algebra Study?

The study is being conducted by several partners of the Regional Educational Lab—Northeast and Islands: Education Development Center, American Institutes for Research, Windwalker Corporation, and Nimble Assessment Systems. The online course is being provided by Class.com.

What Are the Goals and Purpose of the Study?

Educators nationwide need solid information about the effectiveness of virtual courses. This study is designed to inform educational decisions about investing in the use of virtual courses in the Northeast region for specific purposes and populations. In particular, increasing access to critical “gatekeeper” courses, such as Algebra I, is a priority across the region, and offering such courses online may be an effective way to give more students access to the courses. The primary goal of the study is to examine whether taking an online Algebra I course in eighth grade helps put students on a path toward college readiness.

Who Is Eligible to Participate?

Eligible schools include those in Maine that serve eighth-grade (but not ninth-grade) students and do not typically offer (but would like to) Algebra I as part of their eighth-grade math

program. In spring 2008, participating schools will be asked to identify seventh-grade students who may be ready for Algebra I as eighth graders.

Schools will participate in a lottery to determine which year they will receive the online Algebra I course. During the 2008-2009 school year, half of the eligible schools will receive the online Algebra I course at no cost, and the other half will conduct their regular eighth-grade math program. The schools that do not receive the online Algebra I course during the 2008-2009 school year will have the opportunity to receive, at no cost, the course during the 2009-2010 school year.

What Are the Benefits of the Study?

Qualifying schools will receive, at no cost, a high quality, online Algebra I course designed for eighth graders who do not have access to an Algebra I course. The online course includes:

- A highly qualified teacher who is certified to teach math and trained to teach online
- Technical support from Class.com
- Support systems for students taking the online course
- Online teachers who provide regular feedback
- Compensation (e.g., stipends) for onsite proctors/liasons
- Compensation for teacher participation in research activities (e.g., surveys)
- Recognition for involvement and the opportunity to contribute to the broader knowledge and policy development about taking online courses and taking Algebra I in eighth grade

What Key Outcomes Will the Study Examine?

The study will examine the educational progress of students who take different math courses in eighth grade. Progress outcomes include achievement at the end of eighth grade and course-taking patterns and achievement in the first two years of high school. Data collection for the study will run through fall 2010.



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Up to 60 schools in the state of Maine will have an opportunity to participate *at no cost* in a state of the art online algebra course project aimed at increasing access to algebra I for eighth graders who are ready for the course. The project, known as the **Virtual Algebra Study**, will be conducted during the 2008-2009 and 2009-2010 school years.

This is a study of the use of Virtual Algebra to expand access to 8th graders who are ready to take the course but cannot otherwise take it because they attend schools in areas (e.g., small schools in rural locations) that do not offer the course until high school. The study will examine the impact of having access to Algebra I in eighth grade through an online course—in terms of mathematics achievement and later course-taking in high school.

Who is conducting the Virtual Algebra Study?

The study is funded by the U.S. Department of Education and is being conducted by the Regional Educational Lab—Northeast and Islands, a partnership of the Education Development Center (EDC), the American Institutes for Research (AIR), Windwalker Corporation, and Nimble Assessment Systems. The online algebra course will be provided by Class.com.

What are the goals and purpose of the study?

There is a distinct regional and national need for solid information about the effectiveness of virtual courses. This study is designed to inform educational decisions about whether and how to invest in the use of virtual courses in the Northeast region for specific purposes and populations. In particular, increasing access to critical “gatekeeper” courses like Algebra I is a priority across the region, and offering the course online is one potentially effective way of providing increased access to more students. A primary goal of the study is to examine whether taking online algebra in eighth grade helps put students on a path toward “college readiness.”

Who is eligible to participate?

Schools in Maine that serve eighth (but not ninth) grade students that do not typically offer Algebra I as part of their eighth grade math program, but would like to, are eligible to participate. In the Spring of 2008, each participating school will be asked to identify seventh grade students whom they consider to be ready for Algebra I next school year, as eighth graders.