SCHOOL PROFILE

digital learning COLLABORATIVE

Trio Wolf Creek Distance Learning Charter School (Trio Wolf Creek)

Modified hybrid charter school

Chisago City, Minnesota

GRADE LEVELS SERVED: 9–12

NUMBER OF STUDENTS SERVED: 218 FT and 55 PT, as of 2016–2017

Trio Wolf Creek is a modified hybrid charter school located in Chisago City, Minnesota that provides a self-paced individualized learning program for students across the state of Minnesota. Students have the option to work 100% online or in a physical location as well two days a week. Students have not only academic support but also a robust mental health care support as well for the social emotional and behavioral well-being.

Trio Wolf Creek Distance Learning Charter School (Trio Wolf Creek) is located in Chisago City, Minnesota, about 45 minutes north of St. Paul/Minneapolis. Established in 1996, Trio Wolf Creek was created as part of the Chisago Lakes School District through funding provided by a state grant called TRIO (Technology Regional Integration Organization). In 2002 Trio Wolf Creek became a charter school with Chisago Lakes School District providing oversight to the school as the official authorizer. Trio Wolf Creek has its own building, school board, and policies. It serves any student across the state of Minnesota in grades 9–12. Students need to apply to the lottery system in order to be considered for a spot. The school serves both full-time and part-time (supplemental) students. Generally, about 80–85% of the students are full-time. These students are on a path for receiving a diploma from Trio Wolf Creek. The part-time students are enrolled in a traditional school and take one or two courses with Trio Wolf Creek.

In 2016–2017, Trio Wolf Creek served 218 full-time students and 55 supplemental students. The school's student population from 2016–2017 included 97% White and 3% other (Other includes American Indian, Asian/Pacific Islander, Hispanic, and Black.). About 14% of students qualified for Free and Reduced Lunch, 0% are ELLs, 9% are Special Education students, and 78% are at-risk.

As the numbers suggest, the focus of the Trio Wolf Creek program is on serving students who are at-risk, regardless of whether the students are full-time or part-time. Most students who attend Trio Wolf Creek full-time are significantly behind in terms of credit accumulation, and the staff works to close the gaps for those students. Because graduation rate calculations don't fully acknowledge the challenges of schools like Trio that work with students who arrive behind on credits, the school has a lower graduation rate than school leaders would like. They strongly believe, however, that many of the students choosing Trio Wolf Creek are doing so as a last resort, and every student graduation is a major success.

Instructional model

Trio Wolf Creek leaders call their school model a modified hybrid. They have a physical building located in Chisago City, which is open to students for face-to-face opportunities on Tuesdays and Thursdays from 7:30 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. During that time, teachers are available at the physical building to help tutor students with their course work. Students are not required to go to the building. There are some instances where teachers will encourage students who are falling behind to attend to get additional support. Some students choose to come because of the up to date computers and good Internet access, especially if they don't

have reliable access at home. Some students also attend for the social aspect, especially if they find the online setting to be isolating, and other times there might be presentations being provided on topics they are interested in. At times, some parents require their child to attend for accountability purposes. If the student has been truant, a truancy officer might require attendance as well. According to school data, about 60–70% of students attend onsite days each year. Each student works on whatever content they need to during their time at the lab. Their teachers have office hours all day while the students are there, so students can go and visit with their teacher to get additional help as they need to.

Some students live too far away or have other obligations, such as children, work, or health issues, so these students tend to not come to the physical building at all. For these students, Wolf Creek is working to figure out a way to offer an online version of the services they provide during their onsite days. Originally, they were focused on high touch in lab, but staff started realizing that they needed the same opportunities happening online as well, especially for the students who don't have the option and/or opportunity to come to campus.

On Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays, teachers can choose to work at home or at locations other than the building. The only staff at the buildings on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays are typically the Director, Dean of Students, and the Secretary. The reason for this model is to ensure that teachers have the time and space they need to develop the online curriculum in order to best support the students in addition to having dedicated time for professional learning opportunities. During offsite days students access online curriculum and correspond with their teachers over email and through Google Hangouts. Students can schedule to meet with their teachers live for advisory purposes or tutoring when necessary. Math team teachers specifically have tutoring sessions available for students during the online days. Trio Wolf Creek is adding more of the online tutoring for other content classes as well as teacher videos across the curriculum.

Trio Wolf Creek purchases content from Pearson, and teachers add in the additional information and create their lessons in Moodle. Some classes have videos and discussion boards. Teachers spend significant time interacting with students in the discussion forums and in Google Hangouts, fixing links that aren't working, and helping students through lessons if they're stuck on a particular concept. They try to make the course as asynchronous as possible because the families come to Trio Wolf Creek mainly because of the flexibility. The only time that the school requires students to be online at specific times is when there is special education services being provided to a student.

Students participate in nine-week terms. When a student logs into the course the first day they enroll, they see all nine weeks of the course. The staff asks students to complete weeks 1 through 4 by week 5. Week 5 is considered a mid-term, and the school has deadlines scheduled at that time. Students can work through the material in weeks 1–4 however they want to as long as they're completely finished with that part of the course by week 5. If work is not completed by week 5, the student falls down to getting 50% credit, which will hurt the grade even though the student will still be able to pass if the rest of the work in the course is done on time and in a satisfactory manner. This is the case in all classes but electives. Some of the physical education courses have logs due at the end of the week, so those courses require students to be active every week. Moving ahead is not an issue, as the school has many students who will finish in week 7 or week 8 and then take a week off to relax, but for students who tend to fall behind, the deadlines have helped keep them accountable.

Each of the teachers also serves as an advisor, which Trio Wolf Creek calls a Learning Manager. Each Learning Manager is assigned approximately 25 students for advising, and they manage students' learning to make sure they are getting the support they need to move forward in their courses. In August, the Learning

Managers hold an Individual Graduation Plan (IGP) meeting with each of their students that lasts about an hour. During this meeting, the Learning Manager does a credit check to understand where the student is and what they need to do to finish and what they need support-wise to be able to do so. Staff also keeps track of what students need and how they're doing using their student logs. Student logs are based in Google Docs, and they are a way to document everything that is being done to help a student so that anyone who works with the students knows how the student is doing and what other members of the staff are doing to help the student, as well as what works and doesn't work for that student with regard to how to engage them. The student logs also include the classes students are enrolled in, their grades, test scores, how many times they have been in contact with staff throughout the month or if they haven't, email exchanges, phone calls, onsite attendance records, as well as if they've been truant. The student logs are a one-stop shop.

Fridays are grading day, when all grades are calculated and sent to students and parents. Anything handed in by 2 p.m. on Thursday is graded by noon on Friday, and the teachers encourage parents to review their child's progress on Friday afternoon or over the weekend within Moodle's parent portal. Each Learning Manager also sends a personal note for each student saying where the student is and where the most work is needed. In these notes Learning Managers also make suggestions for students to come into the physical building to get extra help on Tuesdays and Thursdays. Teachers and Learning Managers also text and call students and parents in order to get through to make sure they're providing what the students need. The staff devotes many hours to in order to get students to complete their work and move forward toward next steps on their paths.

Student support

Students at Wolf Creek have several support staff to help them throughout their experience. The school has a mental health specialist, part-time guidance counselor, student resource officer, and police officer. Trio Wolf Creek also offers special education services for students who have Individualized Education Plans (IEP). Sometimes at the physical building, the staff will also host speakers and special events; for instance, at the start of the school year, the staff holds an information session called "Meet your Wolf Creek Resources" for students where all of the student support staff talk about what they can do to help the students.

Trio Wolf Creek focuses on in-school mental health because they have seen the benefits that service offers their students. They have two mental health counselors on campus on Tuesdays and Thursdays to meet with students. Both counselors provide six hours per week of therapy sessions. One of the counselors has a professional practice down the road, and the other counselor was brought to Trio Wolf Creek by way of a grant. The students meet with the non-grant-based counselor for 15 minutes at a time for free (the school covers the cost of this person), and they can meet with that person in her professional practice for longer if they'd like but need to be covered by some kind of health insurance for that service. If the students want to meet for 60 minutes at school, they meet with the grant-funded person through a state of Minnesota mental health grant, and that is free of charge if the student cannot cover that with insurance. They also have a list of resources for external help for students beyond what is offered within the program itself. Additionally, they have reached out to a counseling agency that does online video counseling for the students who are not able to come to the building on Tuesdays and Thursdays. The first consultation is face-to-face. After that, the counseling happens by video. Wolf Creek also contracts with the local district or the student's resident district for special education services that the program can't provide.

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The staff has also created collaborative networks for vocation and in-transition services. Every school in Minnesota has embraced the World's Best Workforce Plan. This Plan helps schools provide a focus for students to get excited about their next steps beyond graduation. In alignment with this initiative, Trio Wolf Creek has a careers class to introduce students to various career opportunities, a capstone class with on-the-job training, and a portfolio class where students can put together a representation of what they can offer to future employers and/or programs/schools/institutes. Trio Wolf Creek participates in the annual Minneapolis College Fair, and they also bring many speakers to campus or through live stream. The school has colleges close by that come to visit and get students excited about starting their postsecondary paths. They also host sessions to help students with applying for federal financial aid (FAFSA). Additionally, they are located in an industrial park that has many opportunities for expanding employment and volunteer opportunities, so they are working on building relationships for transition work, internships, and externships.