

# Indiana Digital Learning School

Modoc, Indiana

Comprehensive statewide full-time online K–12 virtual public school program provides a wide variety of options for students across Indiana where and when needed by students

Opened in 2017, Indiana Digital Learning School (INDLS) is a program of the Union School Corporation (USC), a school district based in Modoc, Indiana. Union's goal was to improve their ed tech infrastructure and broaden access to general and career readiness courses for students in their district and across the state. INDLS is a public school offering tuition-free online learning to kindergarten through twelfth-grade students across Indiana. INDLS offers a personalized approach to education and opportunities for their students to earn one of Indiana's three diplomas, including Core

40, Academic Honors, and Technical Honors. It also offers Stride Career Prep for students in grades 6 through 12 as well as a credit recovery program. During the 2020–2021 school year INDLS served a total of 6,044 students. Approximately 20 percent of INDLS students have special needs, one percent are English learners, and two percent have experienced some type of homelessness each year. While INDLS typically serves full-time online students statewide, any student in the USC district can take supplemental online classes to fulfill requirements.



**20% of seniors in 2021 earned a college credit**

## Data Provide Proof of Success

When speaking about the data INDLS maintains, Elizabeth Sliger, Head of School, shared, "As an online school, we swim in data. We collect comprehensive data to make sure that students are fully supported and that all of their needs are being met." Sliger emphasized that Stride provides the support INDLS needs for real-time data collection and analysis. The school looks at graduation rate, credits earned, including credit recovery, student attendance for truancy purposes, student performance data based on grade levels, as well as student growth over the year. INDLS strives to ensure every student makes at least one year's growth each year. If student data indicates students are not achieving academic growth, INDLS devises a cyclical plan of support to get students what they need to move toward their learning goals.



**90.91% graduation rate, which is higher than state average of 87%**

INDLS developed a three-year strategic plan to raise graduation rates. This plan included concentrating credit acquisition to put students on the right track for graduation. As part of this effort, teachers and staff provided continued follow up and support for students up until the day before graduation. As a result of these directed efforts, the graduation rate in school year 2020-2021 was 91 percent, three times the 2017-2018 graduation rate of 30%. During these three years, over 2,000 credits were recovered by high school students who entered INDLS credit deficient. Even

## SCHOOL

**Type of school:**  
Full-time online public school

**Grades served:**  
K–12

**Program started:**  
2017

**Students served by program:**  
6,044 Total  
2,840 Elementary  
2,936 Middle & High  
268 Alternative

**Ethnicity:**  
71% White  
19% Black  
7% Hispanic  
3% Other

**Free/Reduced-price lunch:**  
65%

**Staff:**  
All staff employed by Stride:  
1 Head of School  
20 Administrators  
204 Teachers  
26 Advisors and Aids  
14 Counselors

**Instructional model:**  
Full-time online instruction

## PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

Indiana Digital Learning School (INDLS) is a full-time virtual public school based in the Union School Corporation (USC), located in Modoc, Indiana. USC partners with Stride for whole school management.

INDLS uses a typical “bell schedule” to provide routine and consistency within a virtual environment.

Career Readiness Education is available to all students in 14 career pathways.

Socialization opportunities include competitive e-sports, career and technical student organizations, National Honors Society, and school-based clubs.

INDLS provides various programming options to meet student needs, including special education, multi-tiered programs of academic or attendance support, flexible options, credit recovery, and college credit.

Classes at INDLS are differentiated to meet students’ needs, and these cohorts of students share classes to form online communities.

more remarkable is that in school year 2020–2021, 20 percent of seniors earned at least one college credit before graduation.

INDLS has also seen academic improvement at the elementary level based on nationally normed assessments. INDLS uses a school wide literacy framework to provide instruction aligned to learning performance tasks and demonstrate literacy on state tests. In school year 2020–2021 the school saw a five-percentage point increase in literacy levels of elementary students as measured by Lexile levels.

Nineteen percent of the overall student population at INDLS are students with disabilities. INDLS strives to individualize learning for these students through synchronous online learning as well as specialized services ranging from speech to behavioral therapy. These services can be offered online in some cases and are conducted in person for others. Special education students showed higher growth than general education peers on state tests due to individualized learning, unlike the state average where general education students traditionally outperform special education students.

College and career readiness standards are incorporated in all grades. In high school INDLS offers 15 dual credit courses in career pathways taught by Stride teachers who are certified by an Indiana college or university. These credits are earned by the students at no cost to the family. INDLS opened the first virtual chapter of Future Farmers of America in Indiana in 2019 and now offers nationally chaptered Career and Technical Student Organizations in every pathway.

## How Virtual Learning Works at INDLS

A full-time virtual public-school student regularly communicates with their teachers while interacting with online courses at home or anywhere an internet connection is available. Thanks to USC’s one-to-one technology policy, Stride provides a laptop and a printer to every student, unless declined by the student. If there are multiple students in one household, each of those students receives a laptop and a printer, allowing individual students to communicate with teachers at any time as needed. Sliger explained, “We pride ourselves on running a highly synchronous routine school day for students at home. Just because they’re at home doesn’t mean they don’t deserve as much contact with the teachers as someone in the traditional school.” In addition to the computer and printer, INDLS also provides internet stipends for students eligible for free and reduced-price lunch.

A typical week for students at INDLS involves scheduled daily synchronous class sessions plus independent study and activities time. A sample daily high school class schedule is shown in the table below. Middle school students follow a similar schedule. In kindergarten through grade 5, the schedule is adapted to be appropriate for the child’s age. Students in kindergarten through 3rd grade spend a maximum of one to two hours online each day, while students in 4th and 5th grade may spend more time on the computer, but not as much as 6th–12th graders.

Outside of the live class sessions, students are expected to dedicate the time and effort needed to complete homework and online lessons, meet in small groups for project work, conduct experiments, and engage in activities in which the student is involved.

INDLS’s team believes their schedule is one of the school’s biggest strengths, as the schedule is where it differs the most from other virtual schools, in that it provides more structure. Given that 65 percent of the students at INDLS are considered “at-risk” this structure is important to ensure students receive the support they need from their teachers and other staff.

### Sample High School Class Schedule

MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY
English 10 8:30 – 9:20	English 10 8:30 – 9:20	English 10 8:30 – 9:20	English 10 8:30 – 9:20	English 10 8:30 – 9:20
Biology 9:30 – 10:20	Health Science 9:30 – 10:20	Biology 9:30 – 10:20	Health Science 9:30 – 10:20	Biology 9:30 – 10:20
PE 10:30 – 11:20	US History 10:30 – 11:20	PE 10:30 – 11:20	US History 10:30 – 11:20	US History 10:30 – 11:20
Geometry A 12:00 – 12:50	Geometry A 12:00 – 12:50	Geometry A 12:00 – 12:50	Geometry A 12:00 – 12:50	Geometry A 12:00 – 12:50

INDLS uses online curriculum from Stride which is mapped to Indiana state standards. Stride’s state-certified teachers facilitate online courses and provide instruction in live virtual sessions called “Class Connect.” These sessions are highly interactive with teachers helping students and providing opportunities for students to work collaboratively. For hands-on learning experiences, students are sent materials from Stride, including manipulatives, workbooks, interactive science experiments, and other materials relevant to their grade. Some of the simulations and manipulatives are digital, which allow students the ability to collaborate with other students and produce a shared deliverable for a project.

INDLS provides Indiana students with a comprehensive array of offerings, from standard online K–12 curriculum to CTE pathways, honors classes, and foreign languages, that are not always available to students in their local schools, especially those students in rural communities.

## Career Preparation at INDLS

INDLS also offers Stride Career Prep to middle and high school students, helping students explore career fields and the pathways to get there. Career fields include:

- Agriculture, Food, Natural Resources
- Arts, AV, Technology, Communications
- Business and Marketing
- Education and Training
- Health Services
- Hospitality and Human Services
- Information Technology
- Public Safety

Students have opportunities to earn industry-specific certifications and participate in internships and apprenticeships. Beginning in middle school, the Stride Career Prep program at INDLS provides ways for students to explore career interests. By providing career exploration early, students can identify interests and pursue options before graduation, such as dual credit courses, professional skills training programs, apprenticeships, and certifications.

Career exploration continues throughout high school. Each quarter INDLS hosts career panels in which professionals from various industries such as hospitality, visual arts, entertainment, manufacturing, and health are invited to talk to students about their careers. In school year 2020–2021, INDLS students participated in a virtual visit to NASA, where NASA representatives delivered age-appropriate presentations to elementary, middle, and high school grade bands that focused on NASA's exciting Artemis program which will be our country's next moon landing, and NASA's continued efforts for a Mars landing. Over 2,000 students experienced the NASA presentations.

To support the career prep program, INDLS works with a voluntary advisory board made up of representatives from a variety of businesses and organizations throughout the state. The advisory board helps INDLS keep a finger on the pulse of work-based learning needs of students and helps students gain access to the highest demand jobs in Indiana.

## Credit Recovery at INDLS

To help ensure students meet their graduation requirements, INDLS offers a credit recovery program based on Stride's mastery-based credit recovery curriculum and supported by INDLS teachers and staff. Students show mastery through assessments on the units or sections they need to retake. This allows students to move quickly to the standards that have been more difficult for them. Teachers and classroom aids contact students daily to provide live support and target needed learning. Credit recovery is also offered in the summer, giving students another chance to gain credit toward their diploma. Sliger shared, "Our credit recovery program begins with the belief that every student can earn a diploma. Once the students know we believe in them, really believe they can do it, they start to accomplish things they didn't even know they could."

## Comprehensive Teaching and Support Staff Spells Student Success

Stride provides the faculty and staff for INDLS. Stride teachers are certified in Indiana and work closely with students to ensure academic success. Academic advisors provide support to students who are having trouble or are behind on their work, make sure students attend school, and assist with minor technical issues. For major technical issues, students can call the Stride IT Desk. School counselors work with students on their social-emotional health as well as their path to graduation. Counselors have a conversation with students at least once a semester to check in on each student's progress and graduation plan. The special education team provides support for students with IEP and 504 Plans.

INDLS's combined faculty and staff work together to support each student and their family. Families have full access to their child's learning process at INDLS at all times, including the online classroom, recordings, and the curriculum, so that student progress is visible to everyone involved in supporting the student. Sliger emphasizes that the school's relationship with parents and caregivers is a partnership where nobody is alone and everyone feels supported. A very high level of student outreach is maintained, especially via the teachers and advisors. Credit recovery students, for example, are in communication with their teacher or other staff member every day. Sliger emphasized that the daily live class support of their students is how the "school's heart beats." The INDLS team focuses on a collaborative support system for students, and each team member believes that the only way to know a student is to talk to them and be present for their needs.

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– Head of School  
Elizabeth Sliger

## What Students are Saying

*"In my sophomore year I was failing everything, besides art. But someone came into my life and helped me by transferring me to INDLS, and that has made all of the difference."*

*"I chose INDLS because it was hard for me to concentrate in a regular school. There were too many distractions, including bullying. INDLS allowed me to concentrate better."*

*"I struggled with anxiety and depression. Two years ago, I was in such a bad place. After starting INDLS, I noticed a change where the anxiety and depression started to decrease. My teachers are so nice and let us express ourselves. They ask us how we are doing. I am so grateful."*

*"INDLS allowed me to stay home with my aunt and great grandpa when both had surgery. I wanted to be home to help and care for my family. My mom and dad were also getting a divorce, and I didn't like to be around a lot of people at that time. That's why I decided to come to INDLS."*

## What Staff is Saying about why the INDLS model works

*"Students have a village of people who care about their success, who are there to support them through their journey. Our students matter. We are here for them."*

*"INDLS parents express satisfaction when I reach out to them. They just appreciate having that brief conversation or contact with a teacher that is informing them of their student's successes or ways their student could improve in the classroom. It is different for them than a lot of other previous school environments."*

*"We are invested in our students and care about them individually."*

As the INDLS team has observed often, for a variety of reasons many students are better off in an online learning environment. Sliger stated, "In our school, we talk about the why: why do we do this? My big why is that we're proud to serve 'square pegs,' making sure there's a public education that serves them. How do you fit a square peg in a round hole? You don't, you change the hole. You don't change the child. You change the environment."