The Department of Defense Child Development Virtual Lab School was developed by The Ohio State University for the US Department of Defense’s Office of Family Policy/Children and Youth under Grant 2012-48711-20101 of the US Department of Agriculture’s National Institute of Food & Agriculture.

More than 200,000 children in military families are cared for daily in child and youth care program settings run by the US military. Although military child development and school-age programs are among the largest, most complex, and highly rated systems of care in the world, they experience the same personnel challenges that are prevalent throughout the childhood care and education profession. Like other child and youth care and education programs, military programs must address the challenges of staff turnover, retention, and providing ongoing professional development for new and seasoned staff members. This can be especially challenging, as more than a third of the nearly 30,000 individuals working in military child and youth care and education programs are military spouses who frequently relocate when their active-duty spouse is assigned to a new location.

The Virtual Lab School (VLS) addresses this critical need for an easy to navigate online professional development and resource system that empowers professionals to build their knowledge and skills around research-based practices in child care and youth development. Supported by an extensive repository of professional development videos and instructional materials, the VLS simulates the enriching learning experiences found in university lab school settings. By meeting the needs of both military and non-military professionals who work in early childhood and school-age care and education, the VLS has been designed to support workforce development throughout the US through an anytime, anywhere access system.
The Virtual Lab School empowers professionals to build their knowledge and skills around research-based practices in child and youth care and development.

VLS Core Content

Center-based Care Tracks

Direct Care
- Infants & Toddlers
- Preschool
- School-Age

Coaching & Administration
- Training and Curriculum Specialist (Coaches)
- Management

Family Child Care Track

Courses
- Safe Environments
- Healthy Environments
- Learning Environments
- Physical Development
- Communication and Language Development
- Cognitive Development
- Creative Expression
- Self and Cultural Understanding
- Social Emotional Development
- Positive Guidance
- Family Engagement
- Program Management
- Professionalism
- Child Abuse Prevention
- Child Abuse Identification and Reporting

Structure

- Expert Narratives
- Research Driven Best Practices
- Streaming Video
- Downloadable Activities and Resources

Elements
- Reflective Questions
- Progress Tracking (Military Users)
- Certificates of Completion (Military Users)
Core Content Features

Anchored by 15 Core Content courses that include the 13 Functional Areas of the Child Development Associate competency standards used in early care settings around the world, the Virtual Lab School offers distinct tracks for center-based professionals including direct care providers (infant/toddler, preschool, and schoolage), training and curriculum specialists (coaches), and management personnel, as well as a track for home-based providers who typically care for mixed-age groups. Thus, the Core Content covers research-based developmentally appropriate practices for working with children from birth to age 12 across all the functional roles in child and youth care and education settings.

Features Include:

- Expert narratives and research driven best practices
- “Real world” learning materials and high-quality streaming video
- Job-embedded activities and support for reflective practice and supervision
- Varied assessments, and for military users, off-line knowledge assessment and mastery observation tools that support teachers’ acquisition of the skills needed to engage in high quality classroom practices.
- Inclusive philosophy and practices embedded in all content
- Built-in support for coaching and administration, including progress tracking and certificates of completion for military users. This feature is also currently under development for public users.
Partnered Content

Looking ahead, the Virtual Lab School will host a research-based birth to five curriculum currently being developed for the Department of Defense Child Development Program by a team at Purdue University led by Dr. Doug Powell. This partnership reflects the Virtual Lab School’s commitment to support child and youth educators working to provide high quality experiences for the children and youth in their care.
Recognizing the critical need for career pathways that create well-educated and highly skilled early childhood care and education professionals, The Ohio State University developed an online Associate of Arts degree in Early Childhood Development and Education in 2016. Military-affiliated child and youth program staff who complete VLS coursework, with support and oversight from their trainer, coach, or supervisor, will be able to count their VLS course completion as credit hours towards the online AA degree at Ohio State. This associate degree program will also support military child and youth personnel as they increase their professional skills and establish a sustainable career in both military and non-military settings.
The Department of Defense Virtual Lab School was designed and developed by a faculty and staff team at The Ohio State University led by Dr. Cynthia Buettner.

We thank the many families, teachers, and administrators who appear in our videos, and we celebrate the professionals who care for and educate our nation’s children.

About the VLS

Inquiries about the VLS can be emailed to: inquiries@virtuallabschool.org

To learn more about the VLS team, visit: http://www.virtuallabschool.org/team