

"Knowledge, Citizenship, Wellness"

INDEPENDENCE ACADEMY

NORTH RIVER COLLABORATIVE

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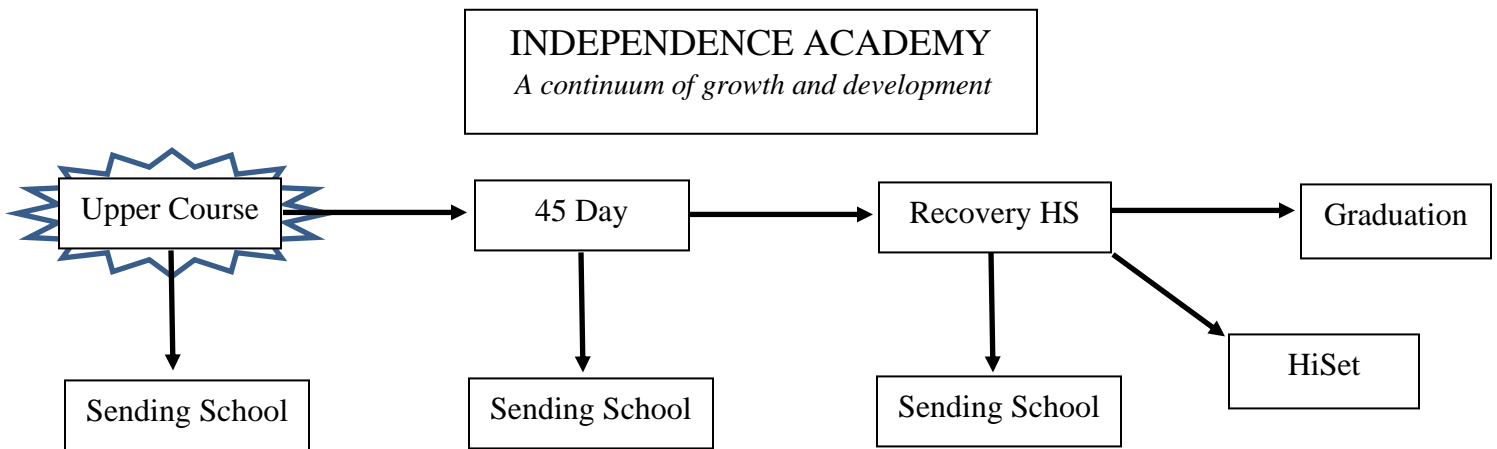
The Upper Course

The Upper Course is the entry point into the continuum of services that Independence Academy offers. This 10-day program is designed to engage students in an immersive experience in the foundations of healthy growth and development. This short-term intervention program is run by our team of experts and is grounded in the basic belief that adolescents deserve an opportunity to develop a deeper level of self-awareness to fully assess how their thoughts, feelings, and actions are impacting their current life situation. We believe when adolescents are engaging in high-risk or problematic behaviors (i.e., substance use), a proactive intervention is a more effective approach than traditionally punitive or isolating measures.

The Upper Course provides schools with an alternative to suspension for youth following substance-related offenses or it can also be used as a proactive measure for students identified as "high-risk" given their level of substance use. In either case, the goal with each student is to assess and build self-awareness. We believe that building trusting relationships with students is critical in allowing them to embrace vulnerability and to feel seen and heard. High-interest and developmentally appropriate materials and strategies are used in both individual and group formats to carry out our work. At the conclusion, recommendations for internal and external changes towards a healthier mindset and a more positive approach to personal growth and development are provided to each student. Some students choose to return to their high school following the Upper Course while others may apply to continue to the next phase of our programming.

- **Duration:** 10 school days
- **Days/Time:** Monday – Friday (9:00AM - 12:30PM)
- **Admission:** The Upper Course is designed for any student who would benefit from an opportunity to gain more awareness of self and how their actions, thoughts, and feelings are impacting their current situation. Most students are referred to this program when there are concerns around substance use. To be eligible to attend and remain enrolled in the Upper Course, students will be assessed for safety in three areas: Substance Use, Mental Health, and Emotional/Self-Regulation. If any student is determined to need initial intervention in any of these areas prior to enrolling in the Upper Course, specific recommendations will be made to the parent/caregiver.
- **Academics:** Students will have time during their day to complete work that is provided to them from their district. Students should bring their own laptop if they have one. In most cases, we can provide a Chromebook to students who need one. Although our goal is to have students complete all their work during their enrollment, more attention in other areas is sometimes necessary. Students will receive academic support from regular education and special education teachers.
- **Expectations:** Students attending the Upper Course will be expected to adhere to the policies and behavioral expectations set in the Independence Academy student handbook. The handbook can be found online at www.iarecoveryhs.org/current-students. Most importantly, students cannot be under the influence or in possession of substances while attending the program and they cannot be glorifying substance use to peers. Students must be engaged in the work and/or be responsive to staff interventions (as determined by staff) throughout their 10-day experience.
- **Transportation:** Provided by the family or school district
- **Attendance:** Students who miss 3 days will be withdrawn from the program.

- **End game:** Students will leave with a better sense of what they want/need, who they are, what they need to work on, and what’s important to them. Each student will leave with a general overview of the necessary components and important work that goes into living a healthy and happy life.
- **Parent communication:** A mandatory meeting with a parent/guardian must take place on a student’s first day or prior to start. An additional progress meeting/phone conversation will be had after day 5.
- **Follow up:** Independence Academy staff will provide one follow-up meeting to each student at their sending school following the completion of the Upper Course.
- **Focus:** Awareness and Assessment



13 Domains of Healthy Growth and Development for Adolescents

- Basic Needs (Food, Clothing, Shelter, Safety)
- Emotional/Self-Regulation
- Substance Use
- Mental Health
- Self-Awareness/Identity
- Physical Health and Wellness
- Social Awareness/Relationships
- Family Relationships
- Relational Connection to School
- Commitment to Education
- Vision/Goals
- Hobbies/Interests
- Vocational Skills

Students attending the Upper Course are provided with an overview of each of the domains above. Additionally, some assessment will be done in specific domains, but students will work towards self-assessment of each of the domains. Areas of strengths will be identified and leveraged for opportunities of growth while areas of need will be met with recommendations for continued work. The goal is to bring the awareness to each student that healthy growth and development is a holistic approach comprised of several different, yet inextricably connected aspects of their life.