



CloudLabs VM Labs Migration Playbook

47,000+ students have already migrated from Azure Lab Services to **CloudLabs VM Labs** in 1 year.

2026 EDITION

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Azure Lab Services Is Retiring. What Happens to Your Labs?

For years, Azure Lab Services has helped institutions deliver hands-on learning through virtual machines, custom images, lab environments, and classroom workflows.

Those environments don't disappear overnight. But the platform they're built on has an end date.

Azure Lab Services retires on June 28, 2027. New customer sign-ups have already been closed since July 15, 2024.

That means migration is no longer a future possibility. It is a project that needs planning. And the challenge isn't simply moving virtual machines.

Your institution may have:

- Courses built around specific lab environments
- Custom VM images refined over multiple semesters
- LMS and LTI integrations instructors rely on
- User access and provisioning workflows
- Azure networking and governance requirements
- Cost controls built around your current environment

A successful transition needs to account for all of them.

The good news? You don't have to figure it out alone. CloudLabs VM Labs provides a migration path designed around the environments institutions already have, with migration tooling and experts available throughout the process.

This playbook takes you through that journey, from understanding your current state to running a pilot and moving to production. Let's begin with where you are today.

Your Migration Journey Should Start with a Plan

Azure Lab Services may still be running your courses today, but its retirement gives every institution a decision to make:

What happens to your labs when the platform is no longer available?

This playbook is designed to help you answer that question practically. Inside, you'll find:

- A readiness check for your current ALS environment
- A clear view of what CloudLabs VM Labs offers
- Guidance for deciding what to migrate and what to rebuild
- A practical view of how VM images and labs move
- A migration framework aligned with academic timelines
- A guided POC path using your own environment
- Azure ownership and pricing options
- A final migration checklist to help you move from planning to execution

The goal is simple: help you move your hands-on learning environments without starting from scratch.

Your Journey, From Assessment to Production

A successful migration doesn't begin with moving a VM. It begins with understanding what you have, what your courses need, and what your institution expects from the next platform.

Use this playbook as a working guide through six stages:

01 | Understand

Know what the Azure Lab Services retirement means for your institution and your existing environments.

02 | Assess

Inventory your labs, images, courses, integrations, costs, stakeholders, and technical dependencies.

03 | Explore

See how CloudLabs VM Labs can support the workflows you already use while giving your institution additional capabilities.

04 | Plan

Choose the right transition approach, map your environments, and build a timeline around your academic calendar.

05 | Pilot

Run real courses and workloads in CloudLabs VM Labs before committing to full adoption.

06 | Migrate

Move your labs and images, verify the new environment, onboard instructors, and transition to production.

| **The principle** — Don't migrate blindly. Assess. Test. Plan. Then move.

How to Use This Playbook

Not every reader needs to start on page one. Use whichever entry point matches where your institution stands today:

- **Just getting started?** Begin with the Migration Readiness Checklist, then Chapter 1 to understand exactly what the retirement changes.
- **Already know your environment?** Skip to Chapter 3 to see how CloudLabs VM Labs compares, then Chapter 4 to start a free POC.
- **Ready to migrate?** Chapter 5 walks through the mechanics of moving images and labs, and Chapter 6 helps you build a timeline around your academic calendar.

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- **Reporting to leadership?** The Evaluation Scorecard in Chapter 3 and the phased migration plan in Chapter 6 are built to drop straight into a leadership update.

However you use it, every chapter ends with a way to go deeper — a demo, a free POC, or a conversation with our migration team.

For the full set of migration resources, guides, and tools in one place, visit the Azure Lab Services Migration Hub: <https://cloudlabs.ai/azure-labs-migration-hub>

Migration Readiness Checklist

Before you start, take two minutes to find out where your institution stands. Answer Yes or No to each question below, count your Yes answers, and read your result. There are no wrong scores, only a clearer picture of what to do next.

The Readiness Check

#	Question	Yes	No
1	Do you have a complete inventory of your Azure Lab Services labs, lab plans/lab accounts?	☐	☐
2	Do you know which of your VM images are custom-built and which are from the Azure Marketplace?	☐	☐
3	Have you documented which courses and departments depend on each lab?	☐	☐
4	Do you know your current cost per lab and per course under ALS?	☐	☐
5	Have you identified your LMS integrations and the LTI versions your courses use?	☐	☐
6	Have you evaluated at least one alternative platform against defined criteria?	☐	☐
7	Have you identified the stakeholders who must approve and execute the migration (IT, faculty, procurement)?	☐	☐
8	Do you have a migration timeline mapped against your academic calendar?	☐	☐
9	Have you planned a pilot with real courses before full adoption?	☐	☐
10	Does your team know how VM images and labs technically move to a new platform?	☐	☐

Your result

9-10 "Yes" Answers

Your institution is ahead of most. Your planning foundation is strong, and your next step is execution: confirm your migration path, run your pilot, and lock the timeline. The chapters ahead will serve you as a verification layer, and Chapters 4 and 5 in particular will show you exactly how the guided POC and migration tooling turn your plan into production.

5-8 "Yes" Answers

You've started preparing, but there are still important planning activities to complete. Now is the ideal time to assess your existing environment, validate your VM images, and build a detailed migration roadmap before academic timelines become more restrictive.

0-4 "Yes" Answers

Now is the time to begin. The earlier you start planning, the more flexibility you'll have to evaluate options, run pilot deployments, train faculty, and migrate without disrupting teaching. Beginning with a guided Proof of Concept can help you understand your current environment and define the right migration path.

What Happens Next?

No matter where your institution is today, the next step is the same:

- Understand what Azure Lab Services retirement means for your environment.
- Evaluate your migration options.
- Validate your existing lab environments.
- Build a migration plan aligned with your academic calendar.

The following chapters will guide you through each of these steps, helping you move from planning to production with confidence.

Let's begin with CloudLabs Key Capabilities

What Changes with CloudLabs VM Labs

Key capabilities

CAPABILITY	WHAT IT DELIVERS
Customized Labs	Windows and Linux labs deployed within minutes, built to your exact requirements
Powered by Microsoft Azure	Lab VMs in the Azure region of your choice, on the cloud your institution already trusts
Direct Web Connect	Browser-based VM access with no installs and no client software
Custom VM SKUs	Exact vCPU, RAM, GPU, and disk per lab, not a fixed list of defaults
VM Shadow	Real-time instructor visibility into any learner's live session
LMS Integration	Both LTI 1.1 and LTI 1.3 supported, for a wider range of LMS platforms
Dedicated & Shared VMs	One VM per learner, or multi-session sharing, chosen per course
Integrated Lab Manual	Step-by-step guides beside the VM, so learners never switch context
Unique Per-User Passwords	A unique random password per learner, distributed directly
Scheduling & Usage Quotas	Automatic start and stop, recurring schedules, per-user quotas
On-Demand Deployment	Labs deploy when requested; no idle pre-provisioned pool
Azure Storage Cost Optimization	CloudLabs helps institutions identify storage optimization opportunities and use Ephemeral OS in eligible environments, eliminating separately billed OS disk storage and potentially reducing overall storage costs by up to 65%
AI-Based Fleet Analysis	Helps organizations examine their lab environments at scale, identify storage and infrastructure dependencies, and uncover optimization opportunities

CAPABILITY	WHAT IT DELIVERS
AI-Based Image Engineering	Helps organizations identify persistent storage dependencies and optimize eligible VM images while preserving applications, data, settings, and workflows
Scale in Minutes	Hundreds of VMs provisioned while the platform manages the infrastructure
Reusable Custom Templates	Course environments built once, reused across semesters and cohorts
Migration Tooling & Expertise	Image and lab migration tools plus experts through every step

[Book a demo - https://cloudlabs.ai/demo](https://cloudlabs.ai/demo)

Chapter 1: The Retirement Is Here

The Retirement Is Here

If your institution still depends on Azure Lab Services, every course, lab image, and teaching workflow now has a deadline.

Azure Lab Services will retire on **June 28, 2027**. The date is official, published in the [Azure Lab Services retirement guide](#) on Microsoft Learn, and the wind-down is already in motion: new sign-ups are closed since **July 15, 2024**. The platform your labs run on today is closed to new entrants and in its final phase.

What this means for existing users

Until the retirement date, your lab plans and lab accounts continue to work exactly as they do today. Classes run, students/attende sign in, nothing visibly changes. That is precisely what makes this retirement easy to underestimate.

After **June 28, 2027**, the service will no longer be available. Labs, VM images, and configurations that have not been moved to another platform by then cannot be used through Azure Lab Services. The years of course-building work inside your lab, custom images tuned for specific courses, lab structures refined semester after semester, do not move themselves.

What Microsoft Recommends

Microsoft's guidance for existing customers is clear: plan your transition to an alternative solution rather than waiting until the deadline. Among the recommended partner solutions for lab scenarios, it names [CloudLabs VM Labs](#).

Summary

- Azure Lab Services retires June 28, 2027; new sign-ups closed July 15, 2024
- Your labs work until that date; the underlying service will not.
- Microsoft advises transitioning now and names CloudLabs VM Labs systems among recommended partners.

Key dates at a glance

DATE	WHAT HAPPENS
July 15, 2024	New customer sign-ups for Azure Lab Services closed
June 28, 2027	Azure Lab Services retires; unmigrated labs and VM images are lost

Don't wait for the deadline to force your hand. [Book a Demo →](#)
<https://cloudlabs.ai/demo>

Chapter 2: Meet CloudLabs VM Labs

Meet CloudLabs VM Labs

The alternative built so your instructors barely notice the platform changed, except for what it can suddenly do.

CloudLabs VM Labs is a fully managed service for delivering preconfigured virtual machines to learners at any scale, for classroom training, professional training, hackathons, and hands-on labs. Everything you love about Azure Lab Services is available in CloudLabs VM Labs: self-service lab setup, preconfigured Windows and Linux VMs, browser-based access with no software installs, and cost-efficient transparent pricing. And we have added more, what ALS never offered.

It is the proven [Azure Lab Services replacement](#), trusted by 100+ leading educational institutions globally. CloudLabs VM Labs is also available on the [Azure Marketplace](#), with payments managed through your Azure subscription, or you can [book a demo https://cloudlabs.ai/demo](#) to see it live.

CloudLabs VM Labs Transition Paths

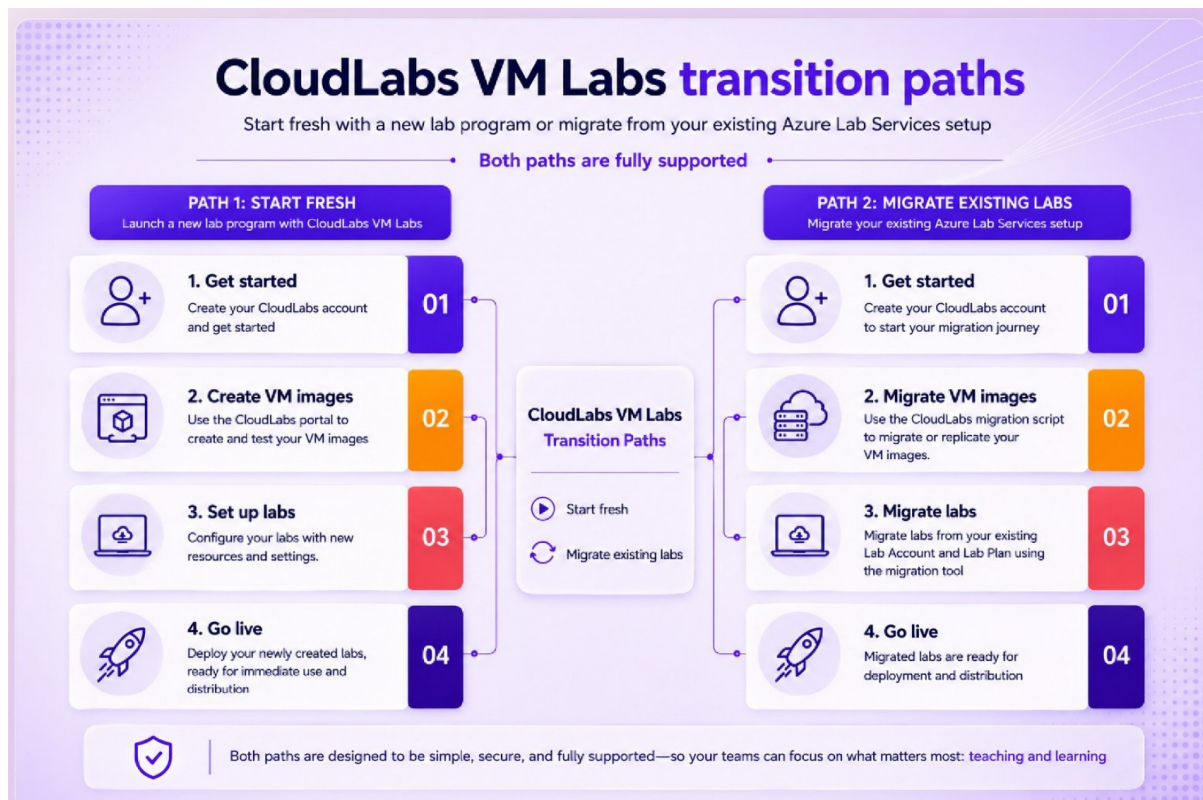


Figure 1 — The two transition paths into CloudLabs VM Labs, both fully supported

Most institutions blend the two: simple labs recreated fresh, complex images and large lab batches migrated with the tooling, all under expert guidance so the right call gets made lab by lab.

Which Path Fits You?

Choosing the right transition path depends on four major factors. Answering the following questions will help you determine the most suitable migration approach for your needs:

1. Custom Images: How can you create or migrate customized VM images?

- Start Fresh:** Using VM Labs, you can easily create images, or you can also consider upgrading or changing the base image.
- Migrate Image:** For complex or difficult-to-setup images.

2. Custom Virtual Networks: Do your labs require Custom Virtual Networks?

- Start Fresh or Migrate Existing Labs.** Before migrating or creating labs in VM labs, you need to create a new virtual network in CloudLabs and set up peering.

3. Number of Labs: How many labs do you need to migrate or create?

- Start Fresh:** Creating a new lab with VM Labs is easy and fast, so consider creating labs from scratch if dealing with 1-2 labs.

- b. **Migrate Lab:** If dealing with a large number of labs, a migration tool can migrate labs in batches.

4. User Migration: Do you need to migrate users along with the labs?

- a. **Start Fresh:** If comfortable adding users or importing a list of users.
 b. **Migrate Lab:** If you are planning to migrate a list of users.

YOUR SITUATION	RECOMMENDED PATH
Simple or standard VM images	Start fresh: rebuild quickly in the portal
Complex or difficult-to-set-up custom images	Migrate: the image migration script moves them as they are
One or two labs	Start fresh: creating a new lab is fast
A large lab estate	Migrate: the migration tool moves labs in batches
User lists that must move with labs	Migrate: users can be migrated along with the labs

Summary

- Everything you love about ALS is available in VM Labs, with more added on top
- Two supported transition paths: start fresh, or migrate existing labs and images
- Most institutions blend both, guided lab by lab by CloudLabs experts

See CloudLabs VM Labs running on your own labs and images. [Book a Demo → https://cloudlabs.ai/demo](https://cloudlabs.ai/demo)

Chapter 3: The Most Trusted Replacement

The Most Trusted Replacement

*Everything your teams rely on in Azure Lab Services carries forward.
 Everything ALS couldn't do comes built in.*

Labs that behave the way your courses need

Your instructors shouldn't adapt to a platform. The platform should adapt to how they already teach, and then get out of the way. That's the design principle behind every capability here.

Launch a lab in the time it takes to plan one

Deploy fully customized Windows and Linux labs within minutes, built to your exact requirements. The 20-minute waiting and hour-long publish steps before you create a lab that your team tolerates today simply don't exist here.

Build reusable course environments

Reusable custom templates turn your best lab setups into institutional assets: without a single rebuild. The work your team did in 2024 keeps paying out in 2027.

Run on the Azure your institution already trusts

Your lab VMs deploy in the Azure region you choose, keeping the performance, compliance posture, and data residency your IT and legal teams have already signed off on. Migration shouldn't mean renegotiating your cloud.

Build custom machines for each course

Data science needs GPUs; intro programming doesn't. With custom VM SKUs you define vCPU, RAM, GPU, and disk per lab. Stop paying big-machine prices for small-machine courses and forcing demanding courses onto machines that can't keep up.

Students click a link! That's the whole setup

Direct web connect puts every VM in the browser, no installs, no client software, no permissions requests. The first day of class stops generating support tickets and starts generating work.

One VM per learner, or one VM for many

Dedicated machines when the coursework demands isolation; shared multi-session VMs when it doesn't. The economics finally flex with the pedagogy instead of fighting it.

The result — Your lab environment must reflect the way your course is actually taught, instead of making your course adapt to a fixed infrastructure model.

Built for teaching, not just infrastructure

Azure Lab Services gave you machines. It never gave you a classroom. These are the capabilities designed around what actually happens when a student gets stuck at 9:40 on a Tuesday.

See the struggle the moment it starts

VM Shadow lets instructors watch any learner's live session in real time, step in, guide, and track progress before a stuck student becomes a lost one. ALS never offered this, and it's the feature instructors notice first.

Every learner gets their own key.

No shared reset links, no self-service loopholes: the system generates a unique random password per learner and delivers it directly. One entire category of security incident, designed out of existence.

Labs live inside the LMS your campus already runs.

With both LTI 1.1 and LTI 1.3 supported, VM Labs plugs into a wider range of LMS platforms than ALS ever did. Students launch labs from the course page they already know; nobody learns a new portal.

Invited means in. Nothing more.

Learners get immediate access to their VMs without touching your Azure subscription or holding portal-level permissions. Your cloud stays yours; their lab stays theirs.

The instructions live next to the machine.

Integrated lab manuals put step-by-step guides alongside the VM itself, so learners follow, do, and finish without juggling PDFs, tabs, and lost context. Completion rates, thank you.

| **The goal** — Less setup. Less friction. More time spent learning.

Costs that stay controlled by design

The question every CFO asks about leaving ALS's bundled pricing: "so what will it actually cost?" CloudLabs VM Labs is built so the answer is "what you decide," month after month.

Pay for learning, not for idling

Labs deploy on demand, when a learner requests them. The pre-provisioned VM pool burning budget while nobody's in class is gone, and the savings start on day one, not after an optimization project.

Turn idle storage into a funding line

CloudLabs' AI-based fleet analysis finds eligible labs and runs them at zero OS disk cost using Azure's non-persistent OS storage, while AI-based image engineering preserves the applications, data, and settings that eligible images depend on. Colleges have cut operational costs by up to 65%. Savings at that scale don't just balance budgets; they fund the GPU labs you've been postponing.

Put the academic calendar in charge of the bill

Automatic start and stop, recurring class schedules, and per-user usage quotas mean every lab spends exactly what you planned for it. Budget season stops involving guesswork.

Let the routine work run itself

Provisioning, start-stop schedules, cleanup, the operations that quietly consume your team's week, run on automation. Your people go back to the work that needed people.

Scale without the operational burden

Exam week stops being an infrastructure event

Provision and scale to hundreds of virtual machines in minutes while the platform manages every layer underneath, automatically. The busiest day of your semester becomes just another day on the calendar.

You bring the labs. We bring the people who've moved them before

A tailored Azure migration plan built from your existing lab plans and accounts, with CloudLabs experts working beside your IT team through platform evaluation, migration planning, feedback implementation, and deployment. You are never the first institution to walk this path, and you never walk it alone.

Azure Lab Services vs CloudLabs VM Labs

Compare Azure Lab Services and CloudLabs VM Labs across nine critical capabilities.
 CloudLabs carries forward every ALS feature and adds the ones that matter.

★ **RECOMMENDED**

FEATURE	Azure Lab Services RETIRING JUNE 2027	CloudLabs VM Labs ✓ THE NEXT-GENERATION ALTERNATIVE
Lab creation time	⚠ Up to 20 min	✓ Instant
Lab publishing required	⚠ Publish required Admins must publish labs before users can access them, a process that can take up to 1 hour.	✓ Instant No publishing step. Labs are live immediately upon creation.
Lab type	⚠ Limited Persistent only.	✓ Flexible Persistent and non-persistent labs.
VMs per lab	⚠ 1 only	✓ Up to 5 Each with unique configurations.
VM SKU flexibility	⚠ Restricted Curated list only.	✓ Customizable Custom vCPU, RAM, GPU, and disk.
User identity	⚠ Limited Azure AD / Microsoft accounts only.	✓ Any identity Azure AD, Google, LinkedIn, and more.
Instructor monitoring	✗ Not supported	✓ VM Shadow Real-time session overview.
Lab lifecycle tracking	✗ Not supported	✓ Full control Filter by Active, Expired, or Deleted.
Cost reporting	⚠ Basic Azure Billing only.	✓ Detailed Power BI reports per user and lab.
FEATURE SCORE	2 / 9 supported	★ 9 / 9 supported

Figure 2 — Nine critical capabilities compared: Azure Lab Services 2/9, CloudLabs VM Labs 9/9

You're not simply moving the same lab to another address. You're moving to a platform with more control over how labs are built, delivered, taught, managed, and optimized.

Choose the Azure Model That Fits Your Institution

Every institution manages Azure differently. Some prefer a fully managed experience where the platform provider handles Azure subscription management, billing, and operational tasks. Others already have enterprise agreements with Microsoft and want to retain complete ownership of their Azure environment.

CloudLabs VM Labs supports both deployment models, allowing institutions to choose the option that best aligns with their procurement, governance, and operational requirements.

OPTION 1

CloudLabs Managed Azure Subscription (CMAS)

Recommended for institutions looking for the simplest migration experience. With CMAS, CloudLabs provides and manages a dedicated Azure subscription for your VM Labs environment. Azure resource provisioning, subscription management, and Azure billing are handled by CloudLabs. Your IT team focuses on virtual labs delivery rather than managing cloud infrastructure.

Best suited for

- Institutions seeking the fastest deployment
- Teams with limited Azure administration resources
- Organizations looking for simplified Azure billing and operations

VS

OPTION 2

Bring Your Own Subscription (BYOS)

Designed for institutions with existing Azure investments. BYOS allows CloudLabs VM Labs to provision and manage labs within your own Azure subscription. Your institution retains control over Azure billing, governance policies, Microsoft agreements, and Azure Cost Management while continuing to use CloudLabs' automation and lab management capabilities.

Best suited for

- Enterprise Azure customers
- Institutions with negotiated Microsoft pricing
- Organizations requiring centralized governance or compliance controls

Learn More → <https://help.cloudlabs.ai/docs/pricing>

Compare Your Azure Subscription Options

CONSIDERATION	CMAS — CLOUDLABS MANAGED AZURE SUBSCRIPTION	BYOS — BRING YOUR OWN SUBSCRIPTION
Azure subscription ownership	CloudLabs	Institution
Azure billing	Through CloudLabs	Directly with Microsoft
Existing Microsoft agreements	Not required	Retained
Azure governance	Managed by CloudLabs	Managed by your IT team
Recommended for	Fastest deployment	Existing Azure enterprise customers

The Evaluation Scorecard

1 Feature continuity with your current ALS workflow	2 LMS/LTI integration matching the versions your courses use	3 Instructor visibility into live student sessions	4 Cost controls, quotas, and reporting depth
5 Lab and VM flexibility for your course mix	6 Migration tools plus guided expert support	7 Data residency options for your compliance needs	8 24/7 support with dedicated response

What customers say

"Their responsiveness and support have been nothing short of outstanding. They demonstrated remarkable flexibility in accommodating our unique processes, resulting in a seamless and highly productive collaboration."

David Trinh, Academic Program Manager, Seneca Polytechnic

[View Success Stories](https://cloudlabs.ai/testimonials) → <https://cloudlabs.ai/testimonials>

Explore Transparent Pricing and Flexible Azure Ownership

Custom VM SKUs let you match VM size and disk configuration to each lab's real requirement, using the same lab SKUs you know from Azure Lab Services, so costs are optimized rather than bundled out of sight.

Estimated **example** pricing options

Choose between Bring Your Own Azure Subscription or a fully-managed CloudLabs subscription.

INSTANCE SIZE	BRING YOUR OWN SUBSCRIPTION		CLOUDLABS MANAGED SUBSCRIPTION	
	AZURE / HR	PLATFORM FEE	AZURE / HR	PLATFORM FEE
Small 2 core(s) , 4 GB RAM, 128GB SSD	\$0.181	\$12 per user / month	\$0.181	\$6 per user / month
Medium/Standard Medium 4 vCPUs, 8 GB RAM, 256GB SSD	\$0.357		\$0.357	
Large/Standard Large 8 vCPUs, 16 GB RAM, 256GB Standard SSD	\$0.682		\$0.682	
Medium - Nested virtualization 4 vCPUs, 16GB RAM, 256GB SSD	\$0.433		\$0.433	
Large - Nested virtualization 8 vCPUs, 32 GB RAM, 256GB Premium SSD	\$0.809		\$0.809	
Small GPU - Compute 6 vCPUs, 56 GB RAM, 256GB SSD	\$1.151		\$1.151	
Small GPU - Visualization 8 vCPUs, 28 GB RAM, 256GB SSD	\$0.865		\$0.865	
Alternative Small GPU - Visualization 6 vCPUs, 55 GB RAM, 256GB SSD	\$0.761		\$0.761	

INSTANCE SIZE	BRING YOUR OWN SUBSCRIPTION		CLOUDLABS MANAGED SUBSCRIPTION	
	AZURE / HR	PLATFORM FEE	AZURE / HR	PLATFORM FEE
Medium GPU - Visualization 12 vCPUs, 112 GB RAM, 256GB SSD	\$1.723		\$1.723	
Medium GPU - Accelerated Visualization 6 vCPUs, 55 GB RAM, 256GB SSD	\$0.761		\$0.761	
Large GPU - Accelerated Visualization 12 vCPUs, 110 GB RAM, 256GB SSD	\$1.491		\$1.491	

**With CloudLabs, you can create custom VM SKUs with different VM size and disk configuration combinations as per your lab requirement and optimize Cloud cost for your needs. Above Example pricing uses the same lab SKUs as used by Azure Lab Services.*

Example pricing scenario

- Duration: 30 days
- Instance: Small 2 core(s), 4 GB RAM, 128GB SSD
- VM quota per student: 2 hours per day per student
- Azure cost per hour: \$0.181

[Get custom pricing →](#)

COST BREAKDOWN	BRING YOUR OWN	MANAGED
Azure cost (PAYG)	\$454.80	\$454.80
Platform fees	\$240.00	\$120.00
Total cost	\$694.80	\$574.80

Figure 3 — Estimated example pricing across both subscription options, with a worked cost scenario

And for eligible labs, storage cost optimization goes further: CloudLabs' AI-based fleet analysis identifies labs that can run at zero OS disk cost on Azure's non-persistent OS storage. Colleges have reduced operational costs by up to 65%.

None of these numbers are locked in once you start planning — but they get harder to capture the closer you get to the retirement date. Every semester spent deciding is a semester without these savings. Chapter 6 walks through exactly what that delay costs.

Ready to test this against your own courses? [Book a Demo](https://cloudlabs.ai/demo) → <https://cloudlabs.ai/demo>

Chapter 4: Start with a Free POC

Start with a Free POC

See your own labs running on VM Labs before you commit to anything, with up to \$2,000 in Azure credits behind you.

Every migration starts with a free, guided proof of concept, and qualified customers receive up to \$2,000 in Azure credits applied to CloudLabs VM Labs usage, so evaluation and early migration begin without upfront cost.

What the POC process looks like

1. **Sign up for your free POC.** <https://cloudlabs.ai/demo> You write your request, and our team of experts reaches out to begin the process.
2. **Environment assessment.** CloudLabs experts review your existing Azure Lab Services environment, labs, VM images, and configurations to determine the best migration approach for your institution.
3. **A tailored migration plan.** CloudLabs experts define your Azure migration plan and timeline and map the rollout accordingly
4. **Pilot with your own group.** Run a pilot batch using your real courses and images. Instructors test VM Shadow, students test browser access, and your team verifies LMS integration end to end.
5. **Cost optimization review.** Evaluate your Azure infrastructure and storage usage, identify savings opportunities, and build a predictable cloud cost strategy before migrating.
6. **Full migration support.** When the pilot passes, the same experts stay with your IT team through migration, faculty onboarding, deployment, and beyond.

The Environment Assessment Checklist

Your assessment call moves fastest when your inventory is in hand. Before the first conversation, we request that you gather:

- All lab accounts and lab plans listed, with lab counts and owning departments
- Every VM image classified: stock vs custom, simple vs complex, and the labs that use it
- User counts and how users are managed per lab today
- LMS integrations and LTI versions documented per lab
- Custom virtual network requirements identified
- Current cost per lab and per course, recorded as your baseline

- Stakeholders named: IT owner, lab manager, faculty representative, procurement contact

★ **Don't have everything ready?** — Start the POC anyway! We'll help you identify what still needs to be assessed.

Summary

- **Zero commitment:** evaluate under guided support before choosing a plan
- **Zero rebuild risk:** existing labs and VM images move with you
- **Up to \$2,000** in Azure credits for qualified ALS migrations
- **Every step expert-led,** from assessment through deployment

The POC at a glance

ITEM	DETAIL
Cost	Free, guided end to end by CloudLabs migration experts
Azure credits	Up to \$2,000 for qualified ALS migrations, applied to VM Labs usage
What you test	Your own courses, images, LMS integration, and instructor workflow
Book a demo	https://cloudlabs.ai/demo
Also available on	Azure Marketplace , with payments managed through your Azure subscription

Book a demo

✉ cloudlabs-sales@spektrasystems.com

Chapter 5: The Migration, in Practice

The Migration in Practice

What actually moves, what changes names, and how the platform does the heavy lifting.

Migration anxiety usually comes from not knowing the mechanics.

This is the same tooling and process that has already moved **47,000+ students' worth of labs** from Azure Lab Services to CloudLabs VM Labs in the last year alone.

How VM images and labs move

Use the CloudLabs image migration script to migrate or replicate your VM images from your Azure subscription into the CloudLabs image gallery, where they're enabled for lab creation. Complex custom images, the ones that took your team weeks to build, move as they are. Nothing is rebuilt.

The lab migration tool then helps you migrate labs from your existing Lab Accounts or Lab Plans in batches, recreating them in VM Labs on your migrated images. One ordering rule matters: **custom images migrate before the labs that use them**, because the tool looks for migrated images by name when recreating each lab.

What changes names, not function

A few ALS concepts carry over under new names, worth knowing before your first login:

IN AZURE LAB SERVICES	IN CLOUDLABS VM LABS
Lab Plans and Lab Accounts	Tenant-level Global Lab Settings: one place for what used to be scattered across entities
VM Pool	Lab Instances: labs deploy on demand when learners request them, with all VM management on the Lab Instances page
Per-user lab hours	Restrict VM Uptime: an optional per-user quota that includes scheduled events
Password reset links	Unique, randomly generated per-user passwords, distributed directly

Verify before anyone teaches on it

After migration, the documented checklist: lab titles present in the portal, lab settings carried over (expiry, idle shutdown), image, region, and VM SKU correct on each lab template, and user lists complete. Then cutover is planned between terms, never mid-course.

Plan around the academic calendar

Avoid: mid-course cutovers · major migrations immediately before term starts · leaving complex images until the final wave · training instructors after migration · discovering integration issues in production.

Aim for: early assessment · pilot before production · migration between academic terms · controlled migration waves · verification before learner access.

Your migration doesn't need to happen all at once. It needs to happen early enough to do it properly.

Before You Retire Azure Lab Services

Migration isn't complete when the labs move. It's complete when you've verified them.

Pre-cutover

- ☐ All VM images migrated and verified in the CloudLabs image gallery
- ☐ All labs recreated from migrated images, images-first ordering confirmed
- ☐ Lab titles, settings, expiry, and idle shutdown configured correctly
- ☐ Correct Azure region and VM SKU on every lab template
- ☐ User lists complete and access verified

Pilot sign-off

- ☐ Instructors have tested VM Shadow on a live session
- ☐ Students have tested browser-based access end to end
- ☐ LMS/LTI integration verified for each course

Production cutover

- ☐ Cutover scheduled between academic terms, not mid-course
- ☐ Faculty and IT trained on the new platform
- ☐ Support escalation path confirmed for go-live week

Retirement

- ☐ All production labs migrated and verified
- ☐ Azure Lab Services environment decommissioned

Summary

- VM images migrate via script into the CloudLabs image gallery, complex builds included
- Labs migrate in batches from Lab Accounts or Lab Plans, images first, labs second
- Familiar ALS concepts carry over renamed: VM Pool becomes Lab Instances, lab hours become Restrict VM Uptime
- A documented verification checklist gates go-live, and experts run it all with you

See your own migration path in action before you commit. [Book a Demo →](https://cloudlabs.ai/demo)
<https://cloudlabs.ai/demo>

Chapter 6: Why Migrate Now

Why Migrate Now

Azure Lab Services Has an End Date

With Azure Lab Services reaching its end of service, organizations need more than a replacement platform. They need a structured migration plan that protects existing lab environments, minimizes disruption, and creates opportunities to improve how hands-on labs are delivered.

What Happens When You Delay?

Waiting until the deadline gets closer can turn a manageable transition into a high-pressure project.

1. Risk of Losing Critical Lab Images and Configurations

Your existing Azure Lab Services environment may contain custom VM images, software configurations, datasets, scripts, networking settings, and other lab-specific requirements.

If these assets are not identified and preserved early, your team may have limited time to determine:

- Which images need to be retained
- Which configurations need to be recreated
- Which software and dependencies need to be reinstalled
- Which labs can be retired or consolidated
- How existing lab environments should be mapped to the new platform

Action Required:

Create a complete inventory of your current lab environment. Identify the images, configurations, applications, data, and dependencies that are critical to your business or training programs. Determine what needs to be preserved, recreated or retired before migration begins.

2. Last-Minute Migration Can Disrupt Learning and Operations

A rushed migration leaves less time for testing, troubleshooting and user validation.

For organizations using labs for training, education, certification or technical enablement, even a short disruption can affect:

- Scheduled classes and training cohorts
- Instructor workflows
- Student access
- Hands-on assessments
- Certification preparation
- Internal technical training
- Customer-facing learning programs

Instead of discovering issues after migration, organizations should test the new environment before moving production users.

Action Required:

Plan and run a migration pilot before moving production users. Migrate a representative set of labs, validate the experience with instructors and learners, and resolve issues before scaling the migration.

3. Delaying Can Limit Opportunities for Cost Optimization

Migration is not simply about recreating existing labs on another platform. It is also an opportunity to reassess how your lab infrastructure is provisioned, consumed and managed.

A migration review can uncover opportunities to:

- Remove unused or redundant environments
- Right-size lab resources
- Optimize provisioning and usage
- Standardize frequently used lab configurations
- Improve resource utilization
- Reduce manual administrative work
- Align infrastructure costs with actual learner demand

Waiting until the last minute can force teams to prioritize speed over optimization.

Action Required:

Use the migration as an opportunity to review your current infrastructure. Identify ways to right-size resources, eliminate redundant environments, improve utilization and reduce unnecessary operational costs.

4. Less Time to Evaluate, Test, and Train Means Higher Risk

Choosing a replacement platform requires more than checking whether it can provision virtual machines.

Your team should evaluate the complete lab lifecycle:

Design → Provision → Deliver → Access → Manage → Monitor → Retire

You also need time to determine whether the platform supports your specific requirements around:

- Lab creation and customization
- VM provisioning
- Templates and images
- Multi-user access
- Instructor controls
- Learner experience
- Integrations
- Security and networking

- Scalability
- Cost management
- Administration and support

A rushed evaluation can result in choosing a platform that solves the immediate migration problem but creates new operational challenges later.

Action Required:

Define your evaluation criteria early and test potential platforms against real lab workloads. Allow enough time to validate functionality, security, scalability, integrations, user experience and cost before making a decision.

Build Your Migration Plan Before the Deadline

A successful migration requires time to assess, test, optimize and execute. Work backward from your target migration date and create a structured plan.

PHASE	WHAT TO DO
1. Assess	Inventory existing Azure Lab Services labs, images, users, configurations and dependencies.
2. Prioritize	Categorize labs by business importance, complexity, usage and migration requirements.
3. Evaluate	Test existing labs on CloudLabs VM Labs. Check for technical, operational, user, and cost requirements.
4. Pilot	Migrate a representative group of labs and validate functionality and user experience.
5. Optimize	Review resource sizing, provisioning, utilization and management processes.
6. Train	Prepare administrators, instructors and other stakeholders for the new platform.
7. Migrate	Execute the migration in controlled waves rather than attempting a last-minute transition.
8. Validate	Confirm that labs, users, workflows and integrations are functioning as expected.
9. Retire	Decommission the legacy environment only after migration and validation are complete.

Migration Is Not Just a Deadline. It Is a Transition.

Organizations that start early have time to assess their current environment, preserve critical lab assets, evaluate alternatives, test real workloads and optimize their new environment.

Organizations that wait are more likely to face a rushed migration with fewer options and less room for error.

Start Planning Before the Deadline Becomes a Problem.

Summary

- Delaying migration risks losing critical lab images, disrupting learning and operations, missing cost-optimization opportunities, and rushing platform evaluation
- Each risk has a concrete action: inventory assets, pilot before full rollout, review infrastructure for optimization, and evaluate platforms against real workloads
- Starting early turns migration from a deadline into a managed transition, with time to preserve, test and optimize rather than scramble

Book a demo

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Sources

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Editorial Note

This playbook is published by CloudLabs (Spektra Systems) as a migration resource for institutions currently using Azure Lab Services. It reflects CloudLabs VM Labs capabilities, pricing, and migration tooling as of the 2026 Edition.

Retirement dates, timelines, and Microsoft guidance referenced in this playbook are drawn from Microsoft's published [Azure Lab Services retirement documentation](#). Readers should confirm the latest details directly with Microsoft Learn before finalizing a migration plan, as service guidance can be updated after this edition's publication date.

Pricing figures, cost-optimization percentages, and capacity examples in this playbook are illustrative. Actual costs and outcomes depend on an institution's specific environment, Azure region, negotiated agreements, and usage patterns. Cost-optimization claims use approved wording only, and the customer testimonial included in this playbook is reproduced from CloudLabs' published customer success stories with permission.

This playbook is intended to help institutions plan a transition away from Azure Lab Services. It does not replace a direct technical assessment of your environment, and institutions with complex, highly customized, or regulated environments should validate specific requirements with the CloudLabs migration team before committing to a timeline.

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