

9 Essential Pillars to Build Your Virtual School

Are you exploring the idea of launching a full-time, part-time, or hybrid virtual learning program?

Whether you tackle your program internally or partner with industry-experts, building a successful model requires careful planning, cross-department collaboration, and a clear understanding of what makes virtual learning work for students and staff alike.

Proximity Learning designed this guide for district leaders—superintendents, principals, technology teams, curriculum directors, and other key stakeholders—to help you navigate the planning process with confidence.

Building and sustaining a high-quality virtual school is a complicated process. Inside, you'll find nine essential focus areas and many of the questions your team should consider as you align priorities and develop your district's plan.



Planning

Where Are You Now? Where Do You Want Your Virtual School To Be?



Leadership + Policy

The leadership of a quality virtual program is responsible for setting and meeting the operational and strategic goals in support of the program's mission and vision.

- What is the goal and purpose of your program? What is the problem or opportunity you are solving?
- How comprehensive do you prefer your program—supplemental or full-time?
- What is your preferred program reach—within your district or spanning multiple districts via a consortia?
- Will learners be 100% remote or hybrid?
- Based on your goal, does asynchronous, synchronous, or a mix make sense?
- Do you prefer a high, moderate, or low teacher:learner and learner:learner interaction?
- What academic programming makes sense for your goals and needs of your community?
- How will you generate a culture of virtual learning that is understood, embraced and embedded across the school community and informed by a strong learner and parent voice?
- For what learner populations are you recommending virtual options? (I.E.- remediation, advanced coursework, hospital/homebound)
- What will be the criteria for participation and what biases might that cause?
- How will you develop a policies and procedures manual specific to the program?
- How will discipline be addressed?
- How and when will learners make a request to participate in your program? What are your entry, re-entry, and withdrawal deadlines?



Organizational Staff

A quality virtual program has appropriate levels of qualified, well-trained, and supported staff who have the resources needed to achieve organizational goals.

- What does your professional development and support system look like for first-time online teachers?
- Under state legislation, what, if any specific personnel does your program need as part of your virtual school?
- Who will champion your program and set the vision for its success?

Your virtual learning leader serves as your program's primary spokesperson and should actively raise awareness and education of your program's value, benefits, and purpose.
- Who else will help your leader ensure learner success?
 - Attendance
 - Counseling
 - Enroll/Drop
 - Grades/Transcript
 - IEP/504
 - Mandated Reporter
 - Technology
- How will you clearly define individual and team roles and responsibilities to ensure effective implementation and support?
- How are you equipping your program leaders and other personnel with the knowledge and expertise to oversee a virtual program?
- How will you empower your guidance counselors so they have the information they need to properly advise and inform learners about their virtual options?



Equity + Accessibility

A quality virtual program's policies and practices support learners' ability to access the program. Accommodations are available to meet a variety of learner needs.

- Do all learners have access to the technology necessary for virtual learning such as a suitable device and an adequate broadband connection?
- How are you ensuring your virtual learners have equal access to resources that your face-to-face learners have? (I.E.- counseling, tutoring, library resources, etc.)
- How will you demonstrate a learner-centered focus that addresses virtual learner needs rather than trying to fit on-campus institutional services to a virtual program?
- Will virtual learners have opportunities to participate in athletics, clubs, governance, etc?
- How will all members of IEP and ELL teams become educated about the factors that determine the suitability of virtual courses for any particular learner or group of learners?
- How will you support your Special Education and English Language Learners to participate in your virtual program?
- Are the grading scales used in virtual courses the same as those used face-to-face?
- Does a virtual course appear on a learner schedule and transcript the same as a face-to-face class?
- How do virtual courses impact learner class rankings?



Preparing

Does Your Team Have the Expertise and Time to Help You Achieve Your Virtual School Vision?



Technology + Systems

A quality virtual program deploys a robust ecosystem of interconnected parts to deliver, track, and assess the progress of their virtual program.

Recognizing that technology creates both opportunities and anxieties, a virtual program must provide an environment that is current, dependable, and rich in the creative use of tools to enhance learning, interaction, and program integrity

- Will your current SIS and LMS work with the purpose of your program?
- How will you ensure interoperability between your technology systems?
- What tools and websites do you need you to get whitelisted locally?
- If the school will be providing laptops for learners to use, what safety and security measures will be installed (such as filtering), and how will the school monitor those measures?
- Which staff need access and training to your SIS and LMS systems?
- Will you require learners to have their Zoom cameras on?
- Are there any FERPA, CIPA, or other learner privacy related procedures or documentation your teams need to complete or be aware of?



Curriculum + Content

A quality virtual program will adopt and implement instructional design methods that enable effective virtual instruction for both institutionally developed courses as well as licensed content from other sources.

A quality virtual program takes a comprehensive and integrated approach to ensuring excellent teaching for its learners.

- How will you ensure the integrity of your assessments?
- How will you measure learner performance against your objectives?
- Will you use the curriculum provided by a vendor or your own organic? Will you buy your own content and mix it with what you develop?
- What other educational technology tools specific to your local needs?
- What grading expectations will you follow? (I.E.- No zeroes, no final exams, grade weights, retake of assessments, etc.)
- Based on the prior year instruction, do you have concerns about some learners not being prepared for the course level they enrolled? (I.E.- World Languages, Advanced Placements, Math, etc.)



Family + Learner Supports

A quality virtual program provides learner and parent/guardian support services to address the various needs of learners at different levels within the organization. The levels of support are appropriate and adequate for learner success.

- How will you onboard students new to online learning including improving their skills with digital resources, citizenship, and troubleshooting?
- Will students be afforded tutoring options outside of the teacher?
- How will you communicate virtual learning options to parents/guardians and learners?
- How will you host a virtual parent night?
- How will you provide updates, policies, and procedures to your families and learners?
- How will you present your available course offerings in a way that your learners and families can easily navigate and understand?
- How will learners receive technical support when the issue is device or local specific?
- How will you educate parents about the affordances and limitations of virtual learning including how to support their learner at home?

Implementing

How Can You Continue Building and Improving Your Virtual School?

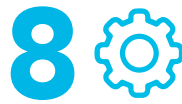


Evaluation + Assessment

A quality virtual program recognizes the value of program evaluation. Program evaluation is both internal and external and informs all processes that affect teaching and learning.

Internal evaluations are more informal in nature and may provide immediate feedback on a targeted area of inquiry. External program evaluations look at the entire program from an objective perspective that will bring additional credibility to the results.

- How are you developing and implementing program or organizational policies and procedures that are reviewed and updated regularly?
- What metrics will you use to determine effectiveness? (I.E.- Pass/fail rates, comparison to face-to-face courses, attendance percentages, etc.)
- How are you collecting data from families and learners' satisfaction with the program?



Continuous Improvement

A quality virtual program proactively and intentionally applies the data collected from evaluations to build, adjust, and implement their strategic plan.

- What process will you use to evaluate your online and hybrid learning teachers?
- Who will attend recurring syncs with your virtual program leadership to ensure accountability and improvements to the program?
- How are your building administrators growing professionally about best practices in virtual learning?
- How will you communicate the results of your virtual program evaluations and action plans to stakeholders?
- How are you budgeting for the sustainability of your virtual program?



Entrepreneurial Initiatives

A quality virtual program recognizes that virtual education includes a commitment to innovation, experimentation, risk, imagination and those overseeing the program must have the skills to facilitate these change processes.

- How will your virtual program distinguish itself from others?
- What partnerships can you maintain or seek to add value to your virtual program?
- How can you increase your virtual program's visibility across local, regional, state, and national areas?
- What professional groups or memberships might you align to promote program credibility and knowledge?

The educational landscape across Texas is evolving rapidly. With a strategic partner, your district and community may adapt with the confidence you need to continue serving your students in innovative ways that prepare them for college, careers, and life.

About Proximity Learning

For over 15 years, Proximity Learning has livestreamed certified teachers and case managers into classrooms around the country to fill teacher vacancies. As the foremost experts in synchronous virtual schools, Proximity Learning knows how to customize each program to fit district curriculum and standards to help them meet their specific goals. Individualized virtual learning is possible when districts partner with Proximity Learning.

Learn more at proxlearn.com

