

PROPOSALS FOR THE DENTON INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT'S VIRTUAL ACADEMY

As a short-term bridge to the 2022-2023 school year, the Denton ISD requests a waiver for the Denton ISD Virtual Academy ("Virtual Academy"), for students enrolled in 3rd grade through 8th grade, so that students enrolled in virtual courses through the Virtual Academy shall be counted in attendance for purposes of the District's average daily attendance in the same manner as other students enrolled in Denton ISD. This waiver request is only for the 2021-2022 school year. Based on review of the Texas Education Code, including Texas Education Code Chapter 48, the Commissioner has the authority through rulemaking of the Student Attendance Accounting Handbook to include Virtual Academy attendance within the calculation of average daily attendance for funding purposes. In addition, the subject matter of this requested waiver is not prohibited under Texas Education Code Section 7.056(e). Finally, please note that the students attending the Denton ISD Virtual Academy shall meet the minimum requirements of 75,600 instructional minutes in the virtual setting.

Denton ISD currently has 210 students in grades 3-8 committed to the Virtual Academy. This number is less than 1% of Denton ISD's overall student enrollment. The Denton ISD Virtual Academy as planned allows for 24 dedicated teachers specializing in online instruction, who will teach only virtual instruction. Additionally, Denton ISD has developed specialized courses specifically for the online space, has procured the necessary materials, and provided extensive training to dedicated educators. It is imperative that we provide these students the ability to learn virtually while still being a part of their Denton ISD local schools with their friends and peers. As we come out of COVID, it is important that we meet students where they are and respect the choices of our families as we address not only unfinished learning, but also future learning. Without a vaccine for children under 12 years of age, many families are concerned for the health and safety of their children and will choose an online educational delivery option for their students. That choice is best served at the local level with local oversight.

Additionally, the Denton ISD Virtual Academy has been developed utilizing criteria which was unanimously agreed upon in the conference committee of HB 1468 during the 87th Legislative Session, as outlined below:

- Denton ISD Virtual Academy shall be available for students currently living within Denton ISD.
- Denton ISD Virtual Academy shall:
 - Include at least one grade level in which an assessment instrument is required under TEC Chapter 39; and,
 - Deliver assessment instruments administered under TEC Chapter 39 to virtual students in the same manner as to other Denton ISD students.
- Denton ISD Virtual courses will be provided through:
 - Synchronous, asynchronous or a combination of both synchronous/asynchronous; and,
 - May be provided with a combination of in-person instruction.

- A student is eligible for the Denton ISD Virtual Academy if:
 - The student is enrolled and resides in Denton ISD;
 - Has reasonable access to in-person services for the course; and
 - Meets minimum academic standards for enrollment.
- Denton ISD will:
 - Periodically assess the performance of students enrolled in virtual instruction under the program;
 - Remove any student from virtual instruction and return the student to in-person instruction if District personnel determine that the student cannot meet the performance criteria;
 - Ensure that a student and the student's parents have sufficient notice and opportunity to provide input prior to such removal;
 - Ensure students enrolled in virtual instruction and receiving special education services continue to receive those services in a manner that is consistent with state and federal law, including but not limited to TEC Chapter 29, and IDEA;
 - Require all virtual teachers to complete professional development courses on virtual instruction prior to providing instruction for students;
 - Ensure that teachers are not required to provide both virtual instruction and in-person instruction during the same class period;
 - Allow students enrolled in virtual instruction to participate in University Interscholastic League in the same manner as in-person students; and,
 - Ensure that less than 10% of the total number of students enrolled in Denton ISD attend the Virtual Academy.



June 1, 2021

Dear Governor Abbott,

As you may know, HB 1468/Bell did not reach the finish line during the 87th Texas Legislative Session. Raise Your Hand Texas engaged heavily on the virtual school issue this session for two reasons. First, because we are concerned about the low quality of the existing full-time virtual providers in Texas. Second, because we know some families are not yet ready or able to return to a physical classroom and will need to continue learning in a virtual environment. We supported HB 1468 and hope some of the options for districts to serve their students online can be preserved.

During COVID-19, the Commissioner of Education rightly waived the portion of state law that prohibits school districts from receiving funding for full-time virtual instruction. School districts and charter schools were able to continue serving their students during this difficult time thanks to Commissioner Morath's quick action.

Now that Texas seems to be emerging from the worst of the pandemic, most students will be able to return to their physical classrooms which we know is the best place for students to learn. A small percentage of families may choose to continue learning remotely but, due to the failed passage of HB 1468, their options are limited.

We are writing to support the continuation of a waiver for students to be served by the school district in which they reside. Local school districts are best positioned to meet the many needs of students, particularly students in need of special education services, mental health services, and ESL services. If a student is enrolled in a school that is hundreds of miles from their home district, we worry the student will not receive all of the services to which they are entitled, especially students with disabilities.

Additional recommendations include the following:

- We recommend a cap on the percentage of students being served in a full-time virtual environment but welcome the opportunity for districts to innovate within hybrid environments on a larger scale. Districts should be able to serve the same student virtually and in-person without funding constraints driving the educational decisions.

- We recommend limiting full-time virtual instruction to grades with a statewide standardized test because we worry about the state not being able to adequately measure the success of Texas' youngest students in a full-time virtual environment.
- Lastly, we encourage state leaders to take a close look at the underperformance of our current full-time virtual (vendor-based) programs. Prior to the pandemic, 86% of full-time virtual students were learning in programs that received a C or lower through our state's A-F system.

Be aware that HB 3643/King establishes the Texas Commission on Virtual Education which is an opportune time to further explore the effectiveness of full-time virtual education and to make recommendations for the 2023 session. We look forward to participating in the dialogue and stand ready to help the Commission and your office with this important topic.

Best wishes,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Michelle Smith".

Michelle Smith, PhD
Vice President of Policy & Advocacy
Raise Your Hand Texas

Cc: Mike Morath, Texas Commissioner of Education

Denton ISD Virtual Academy

3rd Grade

Sample Student Schedules

*Final student schedules will be created by the classroom teachers. Please use these as a guide to help get a better understanding of what a student's day will look like.

3rd Grade Student Sample Schedule Content block may vary depending on which homeroom the student is in.	
Areas highlighted in green could be daily whole group live instruction.	
The areas highlighted in yellow could be either independent work, one on one conferring, or small group work during a portion of this time. This will be dependent on the individual student and class needs. The schedule will be shared ahead of time.	
8:15 - 8:25	Morning Meeting
8:25 - 9:05	Science/Social Studies
9:05 - 9:35	Small Groups and Conferences and/or Independent Science/ Social Studies Work
9:35 - 9:45	Break
9:45 - 10:25	Math
10:25 - 11:15	Small Groups and Conferences and/or Independent Math Work
11:15 - 11:25	Break/Switch Teachers
11:25 - 11:55	Language Arts
11:55 - 12:35	Small Groups and Conferences and/or Independent Language Arts Work
12:35 - 1:05	Lunch
1:05 - 1:50	Special Areas
1:50 - 2:20	Language Arts
2:20 - 3:00	Small Groups and Conferences and/or Independent Language Arts Work
3:00 - 3:20	Language Arts
3:20 - 3:35	Small Groups and Conferences and/or Independent Work- All Content Areas
3:35 - 4:05	Clubs (optional for students and will not be daily)

Denton ISD Virtual Academy

4th Grade

Sample Student Schedules

*Final student schedules will be created by the classroom teachers. Please use these as a guide to help get a better understanding of what a student's day will look like.

4th Grade Student Sample Schedule Content block may vary depending on which homeroom the student is in.	
Areas highlighted in green could be daily whole group live instruction.	
The areas highlighted in yellow could be either independent work, one on one conferring, or small group work during a portion of this time. This will be dependent on the individual student and class needs. The schedule will be shared ahead of time.	
8:15 - 8:25	Morning Meeting
8:25 - 9:10	Special Areas
9:10 - 9:40	Science/Social Studies
9:40 - 10:10	Small Groups and Conferences and/or Independent Science/Social Studies Work
10:10-10:50	Math
10:50 - 11:00	Break
11:00 - 11:55	Small Groups and Conferences and/or Independent Math Work
11:55 - 12:05	Break
12:05 - 12:35	Language Arts
12:35 - 1:05	Lunch
1:05 - 1:45	Small Groups and Conferences and/or Independent Language Arts Work
1:45 - 2:15	Language Arts
2:15 - 2:55	Small Groups and Conferences and/or Independent Language Arts Work
2:55 - 3:15	Language Arts
3:15 - 3:35	Small Groups and Conferences and/or Independent All Content Areas Work
3:35 - 4:05	Clubs (optional for students and will not be daily)

Denton ISD Virtual Academy

5th Grade

Sample Student Schedule

*Final student schedules will be created by the classroom teachers. Please use these as a guide to help get a better understanding of what a student's day will look like.

5th Grade Student Sample Schedule Content block may vary depending on which homeroom the student is in.	
Areas highlighted in green could be daily whole group live instruction.	
The areas highlighted in yellow could be either independent work, one on one conferring, or small group work during a portion of this time. This will be dependent on the individual student and class needs. The schedule will be shared ahead of time.	
8:15 - 8:25	Morning Meeting
8:25 - 9:10	Special Areas
9:10 - 9:40	Science
9:40 - 10:10	Small Groups and Conferences and/or Independent Science Work
10:10 - 10:50	Math
10:50 - 11:00	Break
11:00 - 11:55	Small Groups and Conferences and/or Independent Math Work
11:55 - 12:05	Break
12:05 - 12:35	Language Arts
12:35 - 1:05	Lunch
1:05 - 1:35	Small Groups and Conferences and/or Independent Language Arts Work
1:35-1:55	Language Arts
1:55-2:15	Small Groups and Conferences and/or Independent Language Arts Work
2:15-2:30	Language Arts
2:30- 2:55	Social Studies
2:55-3:15	Small Groups and Conferences and/or Independent Social Studies Work
3:15-3:35	Small Groups and Conferences and/or Independent All Content Areas Work
3:35 - 4:05	Clubs (optional for students and will not be daily)

Denton ISD Virtual Academy

6th-8th Grade Sample Schedule

Final student schedules will be created after student enrollment. Please use these as a guide to help get a better understanding of what a student's day will look like.

Each period will contain synchronous teaching (with the teacher) and time for either independent work, small group work, or conferencing. This will be dependent on content and individual student needs.

Time	6th Grade	7th Grade	8th Grade
1st period 8:15 - 9:01	English Language Arts 6	Art 2	US History to 1877 8 Honors
2nd period 9:04 - 9:50		Math 7 Honors	Principles of Arts, A/V Tech, and Communication
3rd period 9:54 - 10:40	Math 6	Lifetime Nutrition and Wellness	MS Algebra 1 Honors
4th period 10:44 - 11:31	Physical Education	Texas History 7	English Language Arts 8
5th period 11:35 - 12:27	Science 6	Science 7	
Lunch 12:30 - 1:00	Lunch	Lunch	Lunch
6th period 1:00 - 1:47	Investigating Careers	Principles of Info Technology	Art 3
7th period 1:51 - 2:38	Contemporary World Cultures 6	English Language Arts 7 Honors	Science 8 Honors
8th period 2:42 - 3:35	Art 1		P.E. (w/ embedded Health)
Student clubs will be scheduled from 3:35-4:05. These are optional and are not scheduled daily.			