



Virtual Learning Parent Guide

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Introduction

Virtual options are everywhere in K-12 education. Often pairing convenience with quality to ensure all learners get the education they deserve, they've become a popular and effective resource all over the country. It can all feel pretty new, though - what exactly is virtual learning, and how might it impact students and their parents? What do students and parents need to do to find success in a virtual learning environment? This guide will help answer those questions.

There are tons of available virtual learning options in K-12 education. There are entirely virtual schools, where students receive their entire education through learning management systems, all from home. There are also instances where livestreamed teachers teach directly to on-campus students.

These dimensions represent the potential for thousands of virtual program varieties. For example, some programs might encompass all K-12 grade levels, while others only serve high school students. Other programs offer 100% virtual options or a hybrid environment where students learn online a few days per week and go to face-to-face school a few days per week. Schools across the country deliver virtual programs in many different ways, such as through for-profit providers, non-profit organizations, intermediate units, individual schools and districts, consortiums, charter schools, state-level boards of education, or even programs run by colleges and universities.

Proximity Learning has created this virtual learning guide to assist you. It'll prepare you to support your student's social, emotional, and academic growth while exploring your options and eventually enrolling in a virtual school. We encourage you to explore the content inside our guide and educate yourself about virtual learning, how it works, and practical strategies to support your student at home.

Families are essential learning partners. Thanks for learning more about this learning environment and joining us to educate your child.

Is virtual learning the right choice for me?

Online learning has gained increased acceptance in recent years. Some students now recognize that they thrive better in a virtual environment than in a traditional face-to-face classroom. However, students can choose virtual learning for a variety of reasons.

There are no right or wrong reasons for preferring virtual learning. Often, the reasons align to one of three categories: academic, social-emotional, or life circumstances. The flexibility of virtual learning is one of its primary advantages; it allows more students to choose an experience that they prefer based on who they are and what they need.



- Access to an expanded range of courses not available at their local school
- Recover a course credit from a previously failed class
- Seek dual credit to receive future college credits
- Access course material 24/7
- Re-read and re-watch lectures, discussions, explanations, and comments on-demand
- Gain access to expert teachers across the country not available in your geographic location



- Find an alternative learning experience for those who are homebound due to illness or injury
- Access educational experiences free from common classroom distractions or minimize the risk of bullying
- Participate online in a less intimidating environment than in the classroom
- Connect privately with the teacher to ask questions and get feedback without the social pressure of other classmates



- Utilize flexibility to accommodate schedule challenges and family circumstances
- Get experience with online learning before attending college
- Become more comfortable with modern technology tools used in college and career environments
- Have more control over when, where, and how you learn

Students who enroll in a virtual course can be:

full-time students - taking 100% of their academic programming virtually;

part-time students - taking some courses virtually and some at their traditional school

Summer students - those who prefer or need to advance or recover their learning during June and July. Virtual schools are great for students who want to take courses required for graduation and free up scheduling space for electives or advanced placement courses during the academic year.

When COVID-19 forced millions of learners to transition to remote learning, some families found they prefer a 100% virtual learning environment. As a result, families are now looking for permanent virtual options. These options include solutions outside of their local public schools, choosing to homeschool their students, or integrating content from virtual providers into their students' lives.

To address the demand for virtual learning, Proximity Learning partners with schools to build virtual programs staffed by certified teachers. Students remain fully enrolled at their local school but take coursework virtually using Proximity Learning's teachers, technology, and curriculum—all customized to your school's needs.

Key terms and definitions

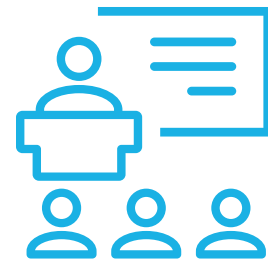
With the wide variety of options, it can be confusing and overwhelming to understand how each virtual experience works. Here are popular words and definitions to assist you with standard terms and phrases you may encounter. We also provide added context of how that term applies to virtual learning at Proximity Learning.

Term	Definition	How it applies to us
Asynchronous	Students participate in an online learning course at different times and places; it does not require students to log in at specific times with the teacher or classmates.	Proximity Learning offers asynchronous options. However, our primary virtual learning delivery is synchronous, allowing students to engage with their teacher and class in real-time.
Blended Learning	A formal education program in which a student learns in part through online learning with some control over time, place, path, and pace; part of the learning is supervised in-person at school.	Proximity Learning's courses are scheduled at specific times and in partnership with our partner schools. Teachers deliver content live and record the sessions for students to watch if they are absent or need to review the material.
Credit Recovery	This mode of delivery is often conducted asynchronously for students to retake a previously failed course required for high school graduation and earn credit if the student completes the course requirements.	Proximity Learning has a full suite of credit recovery options available to help students recover lost credits and get back on the path to graduation.
Learning Management System	A software application deployed for the delivery, documentation, tracking, and reporting of educational courses. An LMS helps the online teacher deliver content to students, administer and analyze assessments, track student progress, and manage records. Common examples include Blackboard, Canvas, Google Classroom, or Schoology.	Proximity Learning uses the Canvas Learning Management System to host and deliver our virtual courses.
Provider or Vendor	An entity that public and private schools partner with to gain access to resources, educational technology tools, or virtual learning content and courses.	Proximity Learning partners and provides our private and public schools with virtual learning solutions for their families across the country.
Student Information System	These are platforms that organizations deploy to enable better management of courses. They typically complete tasks like registering students, building class schedules, collecting grades, and taking attendance. Common examples include eSchool, Infinite Campus, or Powerschool.	Proximity Learning has developed and deployed our internal student information system, PLI Connect. Students and parents do not receive access to PLI Connect, but the school personnel does.
Synchronous Learning	Learning occurs simultaneously with the teacher and classmates; however, everyone does not need to be in the same place.	Proximity Learning delivers synchronous learning, so our students can receive direct instruction and engagement from the instructor while collaborating with students.

Term	Definition	How it applies to us
Virtual Course	A course where teacher-led education takes place over the Internet, with the teacher and student separated geographically, often using an LMS system and video-conferencing software.	Proximity Learning's virtual courses are delivered using the Canvas LMS and the Zoom video-conferencing system.
Virtual School	Organizations that work directly with students and provide virtual learning services as a separate school within a division or region.	Proximity Learning can partner with public and private schools to develop and host their virtual school. We customize it to their needs.
Virtual Teacher	A teacher-of-record who virtually delivers content, curriculum, and the learning experience for students.	Proximity Learning teachers complete a week-long training cohort that assists with their transition into virtual instruction. All teachers are content-area certified and are assigned a vice principal and mentor to help support.

What learning modalities do virtual options usually come in?

Educational institutions nationwide are building a continuum of learning experiences for students. The learning continuum allows students to determine the most appropriate learning environment based on their needs, learning style, and circumstances. The three most common learning modalities are virtual, blended, and face-to-face.



Virtual	Blended	Face-To-Face
Students do not attend class on campus with a teacher and peers. Learning activities take place online using a combination of synchronous or asynchronous experiences depending on the program.	Students attend class a few days per week on campus with their teacher and peers. Students have required online learning activities when they do not participate in face-to-face classes.	Students attend class with the teacher and peers daily on-campus during a specific time.

What’s the difference between synchronous and asynchronous?

There are two primary delivery methods with virtual learning—synchronous or asynchronous. The most common method schools use is asynchronous. To learn more about the advantages and disadvantages of each, we encourage you to review the chart below.

Synchronous	Topic	Asynchronous
Feedback can be delivered immediately in real-time.	Feedback	Feedback is generally provided offline through email, discussion forums, or directly on assignments.
Students interact with one another and the teacher during class which may reduce feelings of isolation.	Learning Community	Students interact with their teacher and classmates primarily using discussion forums and emails, resulting in less social interaction.
The teacher leads pace during live sessions.	Pace	The student often drives the pace where they may work ahead on the material and build their schedule.
Students attend class with a live instructor during structured times.	Time	Students work through the materials at their pace with a more relaxed schedule.

Students don’t attend campus when enrolled in Proximity Learning’s Virtual School. Instead, they receive a daily schedule with predetermined times to log in and interact in real-time with our live instructor and other students from the comfort of their homes.

How will my student find success in a virtual learning environment?

Successful virtual learning students possess a set of specific behaviors and qualities. Still, even if a student doesn't initially have these characteristics, it doesn't mean they can't be successful. The questions below intend to get you thinking about your student and help them recognize the necessary qualities to develop and focus on in a virtual school environment. The questions also help parents gain perspective of how much or little time they may need to provide to support their students at home.

Access to Technology

- Does your student have daily access to a computer with high-speed Internet?
- Does your student have their own device, or do they share it with another household member?

Communication

- Is your student comfortable asking for help when they need to?
- Is your student comfortable articulating their questions or concerns using email or instant messaging?

Digital Literacy

- Is your student comfortable with the basic skills required to participate in a virtual classroom without immediate hands-on technical assistance? (I.E., Emails, uploading and downloading assignments, discussion forums, etc.)
- Does your student recognize how to use technology responsibly?

Foundational Skills

- Has your student demonstrated grade-level success with reading, writing, and math skills?
- Does your student have basic typing skills?

Motivation

- Does your student have a primary reason for taking the course virtually?
- Is your student interested in the virtual course they chose?
- Does your student have high expectations for themselves?

Self-Regulation

- Does your student need frequent reminders to complete assignments and tasks?
- When your student gets stuck on a project, do they take time to think through how to proceed next?
- Can your student focus in front of the computer screen without multitasking on other activities (I.E., texting, social media, web browsing, etc.)?

Social Integration

- Will your student miss the direct face-to-face social interaction with their teacher and classmates?
- Does your student still have the ability to participate in athletic activities or extracurricular experiences at their face-to-face school?

Time Management

- How can your student develop a structured routine virtually similar to taking courses face-to-face?
- Is your student prepared to spend a similar amount of time studying and completing activities similar to their face-to-face courses outside of class hours?

Unlike most traditional virtual programs, Proximity Learning's courses are synchronous, which minimizes some of the challenges virtual students face in asynchronous classes. Proximity Learning's virtual systems provide daily opportunities for students to connect one-on-one, in groups, and with their instructor(s) in an open, inclusive, and equitable environment. Because we deliver live instruction, our students can see and hear their teacher and classmates while asking questions directly over livestreamed video.

What factors should we consider before choosing virtual learning?

Before you and your student begin your virtual learning journey, there are questions you both should consider to help you make an informed decision. These questions will help you plan and clarify questions with your family, your local school, and the virtual learning provider.

Technology

- What computing device does my student need?
- Who is responsible for providing the device? (I.E., parents, district, provider, etc.)
- What are the technical requirements for the device?
- How can my student receive tech support?
- Does my student need additional equipment? (I.E., headsets, printer, scanner, microphone, external webcam, etc.)
- What support does my school provide if my student needs Wifi or a faster Internet connection?
- How does the virtual program protect its students' privacy?

Support

- How is support provided if my student has an Individualized Education Program (IEP) or 504 plan?
- My student is an English Language Learner. Can they participate in a virtual school? If yes, what support is available? How will their experience be different?
- How will my student be onboarded into the system?
- Are there counseling services available?
- How do I find student progress and grades?
- Does the school intervene with students when needed? How is the parent notified?
- Can I participate in conferences or virtual curriculum nights?
- Is parent orientation provided?
- Can my student still participate in athletics or extracurricular activities?
- What process exists to resolve my concerns or complaints?

Grades and Reporting

- How will the graded work compare to work used in face-to-face courses?
- How will a virtual course appear on my student's transcript?
- What consequences exist if my student doesn't pass?

Course Quality

- Does the NCAA approve the virtual course for student-athletes?
- Does a certifying body like COGNIA accredit the courses?
- What are the quality assurance measures taken to ensure the rigor and design of the course's instruction?
- Does the school offer CORE classes, electives, Advanced Placement, or post-secondary programs with college credit?
- Can my student take electives like music, P.E., and art? How are these courses taught virtually?

Virtual Learning Environments

- What does a typical week look like for my student?
- What kinds of activities will my student take part in?
- Does the program have interaction through live chat, video conferencing, etc.? Are the sessions recorded to be accessed at a later time or for review? What's the attendance policy?
- Does my student need extra materials or resources besides their computer or headset?
- What is the school's policy for dropping courses?
- Do I have to take my child to a specific site for state tests?
- Are there online clubs, communities, and chat rooms for students? Who supervises them?
- How much of the coursework involves interaction and collaboration?

Virtual Course Teacher

- How is the teacher trained to teach in this way?
- How does the teacher support my student's IEP or 504?
- How will students connect with teachers other than submitting assignments?
- Are teachers available for extra help? When?

Proximity Learning works with our school partners to customize the virtual learning experience to their community's needs. This work often includes creating bell schedules, academic calendars, and grading policies that closely resemble or match your student's face-to-face environment.

Reality check - common virtual learning misconceptions

Misconception	Reality
Virtual learners work in isolation from their instructor.	Virtual programs such as Proximity Learning’s deliver instruction synchronously. The synchronous instruction directly engages students with their teacher and classmates, where they can see and hear one another simultaneously.
Virtual learners have minimal interaction with their classmates.	Virtual programs such as Proximity Learning’s connect learners in a live format. As a result, students engage with one another in chats, video-conferencing, break-out rooms, small groups, and projects.
Virtual learning is less rigorous than traditional or face-to-face classes.	Learning online isn’t easier or harder than face-to-face instruction—it’s just different. The difficulty level varies in an online course, similar to face-to-face classes.
Virtual learning is best for self-driven students with excellent digital skills.	Although successful virtual students model specific attributes such as good time management or self-motivation, all students can learn these skills. Proximity Learning provides a student orientation that brings awareness of these skills, including direct support from our teachers who assist in building them.

Misconception	Reality
Virtual Schools lack structure.	<p>Many parents find a virtual school to be very structured. At Proximity Learning, we work with schools to create daily virtual schedules that mirror the face-to-face environment. Virtual schools are also flexible—your student can modify activities, and teachers generate spontaneity to spark interest and curiosity during particular lessons and days.</p>
Supporting a virtual school student at home is a full-time job.	<p>Virtual school parents do play an integral role in the success of their students. Acting as your child’s “learning coach” does take time.</p> <p>Depending on the virtual school, your student may need to spend time learning at home, similar to traditional school. However, at Proximity Learning, each course is led and taught by a teacher responsible for educating your student.</p> <p>Younger or elementary students will need more substantial parental supervision with less in middle school and minimal supervision for high school. Parents can help lessen the time required to supervise by establishing expectations, consistent routines, and checking in with their students before and after each school day.</p>

Unlike most traditional virtual programs, Proximity Learning’s courses are structured with set student schedules. This creates a consistent learning environment that allows students to get into a routine and learn more effectively.

How is my student supported?

Virtual school students need support when learning at home, just like when they're learning in face-to-face classes. Your student may perform better by continually showing interest in their virtual school success. Studies have shown that students with higher degrees of family involvement and parent engagement earn higher grades or test scores, graduate from high school and attend post-secondary education, develop self-confidence and motivation in the classroom, and decrease chronic absenteeism.

While teachers are the primary facilitator of your student's learning, learning is a shared responsibility. With virtual learning, students may struggle with the lack of structure they are used to at school and may need help setting a daily learning schedule. This should include time online and offline, socializing, and time to exercise or enjoy the outdoors. Here are a few helpful tips.

Before the course begins

Before your student begins learning in a virtual program, consider taking action to decrease the number of issues your student might experience and ensure a successful start. Focusing on prevention may reduce the amount of intervention needed later.

- I have helped my student set up a dedicated workspace free from distractions and other disruptions to study, focus, and learn. My student had some ownership in decorating or choosing their workspace.
- I have assured that my student has access to a computer, reliable internet, and comfortable headphones to efficiently complete their coursework and engage with their teacher and classmates.
- I have access to and have reviewed my student's course schedules. I created and posted a visual schedule my student can follow. (Older kids can use a calendar, planner, chalkboard, or digital organizer to track what's happening each day). I have established our family's expectations with my student.

First two weeks

Before your student begins learning in a virtual program, consider taking action to decrease the number of issues your student might experience and ensure a successful start. Focusing on prevention may reduce the amount of intervention needed later.

- I've helped or verified that my student can log into the Learning Management System. I have confirmed they can access everything they need.
- I've talked with my student about how and when to seek help when they need it—and confirmed they know who to contact. This may include contacting their virtual school teacher, seeking technical assistance, or reaching out to our school for assistance.

- I am clear on the school's and my student's teacher's expectations regarding attendance, grades, homework, and other policies.
- I know how to check my student's grades and course progress.
- I proactively check in with my student to see if they need assistance getting acclimated to the virtual learning environment.

Ongoing/regular actions

You should consider implementing a few of these actions consistently throughout the entire duration of the course.

- I model a positive perspective and encourage my student to adopt a growth mindset.
- I encourage my student to keep a morning routine as if they were going to a traditional school.
- I help my student take plenty of breaks from their computer to get time away from the screen. I encourage them to get up, stretch, get some fresh air, and have a snack as time allows.
- I encourage my student to participate in their virtual classrooms with their teacher and classmates so the experience may feel similar to a regular school day.
- I understand virtual learning might be new to my student, and some bumps may occur along the way. I will help my child navigate the challenges.
- I am ready to support my student and work with the school and teacher to ensure success.
- If my student is absent, I will check in to ensure they make up the missing work. I remind my student that virtual courses are as important as traditional face-to-face courses.
- I monitor my student's academic and attendance progress.
- I showcase my student's work, such as drawings, writing, or projects in our home.

Final two weeks

These are example actions to implement which will help your student finish the course successfully.

- I'll check in with my student to ensure they are preparing for their final exams and projects.
- I know when final grades will become available in our school's student information system.

A parent's responsibilities

What can you do to ensure that your student is set up for success?

- Ensure your student has a chair with back support.
- Provide your student with a desk and ensure your student is sitting upright with good posture.
- Remind your student to avoid resting their elbows on the hard surface or edge of their desk for prolonged periods.
- Ensure your student is working in a well-lit space.
- Monitor your student's workstation and verify your student is not reaching excessively for their keyboard while typing.
- Position the digital device monitor, so the screen allows your student to keep their neck in a neutral or straight position.
- Set boundaries and encourage your student to stop using digital devices 60-90 minutes before bedtime.
- Be aware of potential signs of eye strain tied to frequent screen time, such as frequent squinting, closing one eye to see better, or constantly rubbing eyes.
- Encourage your student to spend a few minutes outside every day to take advantage of natural light.
- Make sure their workstation is visible to yours and in an open space for younger students.
- Help ensure the camera is positioned well with your student so their teacher and classmates can see your student's entire face.

Thanks for reading!

Through accessible everyday technology, more parents and students are increasingly interested in virtual learning options, either as a replacement or a supplement to their traditional education. There is no one right kind of virtual learning, and describing the range of virtual courses can be at least as complex as describing the kinds of lessons presented in face-to-face environments. For many, virtual schooling provides freedom of flexibility that traditional mainstream settings do not always offer.



Online learning brings new possibilities to K-12 education.

- Individualization for various learning styles and special needs
- Flexibility in scheduling and location
- Access to learning opportunities that could be limited in the traditional classroom due to funding, geography, or a lack of highly qualified teachers at local schools.

At the least, with the rise of virtual and blended learning, students now have more decisions to choose the best learning environment for their academic, social-emotional, and life needs.

Remember, your perspective is often contagious and can set the tone for learning in your home. We encourage you to leverage the resources you learned in this guide and join us in serving your student's best interests.

What Other Resources Can You Share For Us To Explore?

Go to: <https://proxlearn.canto.com/b/S6SSC>
or scan the QR code below

