Virtual and Blended Courses

OVERVIEW

The purpose of this document is to assist NYCDOE high schools in understanding and effectively implementing policies regarding virtual and blended courses.[1] Virtual and blended courses, like all credit-bearing courses, must align to learning standards, provide adequate instructional time, and be taught by subject-certified teachers. The only substantive difference between virtual, blended, and traditional classroom courses is how instruction is delivered and where students are when receiving instruction.

> In April 2024, NYSED voted to define virtual learning[2] and explain the conditions under which virtual/blended instruction may be delivered.[3] These updates codify virtual/blended learning terminology in Part 100 and solidify their place in New York State's menu of learning options. The amendments to Part 100 regarding virtual learning do not take effect until September 1, 2024. This guidance includes new preparatory steps that all schools offering virtual/blended learning in 2024-25 must take this spring and summer, prior to the start of the school year.
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> In alignment with the revised New York State regulations, this guidance uses the term "virtual" instead of "online" when referring to instruction that takes place exclusively through internet-connected devices and will replace previous references to online courses. Key terms are further defined on page 3.

This guide supplements existing resources on graduation requirements and policies for awarding high school course credit, as outlined in the High School Academic Policy Guide. For additional support implementing virtual and blended courses, contact your OPE Lead (formerly APPA).

QUICKLINKS

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[1] This guide was previously called "Online and Blended Courses"

[2] Part 100.1(y)

[3] Part 100.2(u)

KEY TERMS

Virtual Learning Environment: An instructional and learning environment facilitated through digital video-based technology and/or a virtual learning management system where teacher-to-student, student-to-student, and/or student-to-content interactions occur solely through digital, internet connected technology.

Virtual Instruction: Synchronous, or a combination of synchronous/asynchronous instruction designed for delivery entirely in a virtual learning environment where there is regular and substantive interaction between the student and teacher.

Blended Instruction: Instruction that is partially delivered as synchronous instruction in an in-person learning environment and partially as synchronous or a combination of synchronous/asynchronous instruction in a virtual learning environment where there is regular and substantive interaction between the student and teacher.

Virtual/Blended Course: A course where students receive instruction entirely through internet-connected devices (i.e., a virtual course) or partially through internet-connected devices (i.e., a blended course). Because the same policies apply regardless of whether a course is virtual or blended, the term "virtual/blended course" is used throughout this document to refer to both models.

Remote Instruction:[4] Virtual instruction that happens during emergency circumstances only and is not meant for non-emergency usage. The difference between remote and virtual instruction is that "remote instruction is instruction that occurs due to limitations on access to a brick-and-mortar classroom while virtual instruction is an intentional learning course or program conducted through digital means."[5] This document describes policies related to virtual/blended courses; it does not address system-wide pivots to remote instruction due to emergencies.

Synchronous Learning: Synchronous instruction is defined as live interaction between the teacher and student(s) at a scheduled time, communicated in advance to parents/families and students.

Asynchronous Learning: Instruction and learning opportunities that are not centered on students and teachers interacting at the same time. Asynchronous learning activities enable students to work at their own pace so they can learn the same material at different times independently.

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[4] The term "remote" is sometimes used in non-emergency contexts. For example, teachers who teach Virtual Learning Classrooms (VLC) courses are sometimes referred to as "remote teachers." The attendance policy also uses the term "remote" to describe when students are learning off site.

[5] NYSED P-12 Education Committee Memo, November 30, 2023

> **On Site/Off Site**: A course is considered "on site" when students receive instruction while inside the school building, regardless of where the teacher is. A course is considered "off site" when students receive instruction some place other than inside the school building such as at home or at a public library. The terms "at school" and "at home" respectively are used in parent-facing language in this document for clarity.
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> **School Based Virtual Learning (SBVL)**: Virtual/blended courses offered by a school to their currently enrolled students in order to provide opportunities such as advancement and/or flexibility to meet the needs of students and staff in the school community. Participation in SBVL requires central approval.
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> **Virtual Learning Classrooms (VLC)**: A program that offers schools the opportunity to enroll students in virtual/blended courses that are not offered at their school; classes are taught synchronously by Centrally-hired and trained teachers before, during, and after the regular school day.

Virtual/Blended Course Requirements

Virtual/blended courses are regular courses and must meet the same academic policies required of traditional classroom courses.[6] A virtual/blended course can be credit-bearing, provided it meets all of the following requirements:

- The course aligns with New York State commencement-level learning standards for the subject area, as outlined in the course syllabus;
- Instruction is provided or supervised by a NYCDOE subject-certified teacher;
- The course satisfies instructional time requirements (specifically, 180 minutes per week throughout the semester or the equivalent of 54 hours[7] of instruction per credit). Students may be on site or off site during the required instructional time. Both synchronous and asynchronous learning can fulfill course instructional time requirements provided that the following conditions are met:
  - All courses must have at least one synchronous learning period per week that is programmed in STARS. This period can occur on any day of the week.
  - **Schools must not offer fully asynchronous courses,** but asynchronous learning time can account for a portion of the course instructional time. In order to count asynchronous learning time toward course instructional time requirements, schools must have mechanisms in place to track student engagement, and they must clearly document the expected time for students to complete asynchronous activities.

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[6] Per NYSED Commissioner's Regulations Part 100.5 10.

[7] Or 45 hours of instruction per credit during the summer term.

- The course includes regular and substantive interaction between the student and the teacher providing direction and/or supervision.
  - "Regular and substantive interaction" means schools must ensure that students receive intensive instruction in the subject matter area provided under the direction and/or supervision of a NYCDOE subject-certified teacher.
    - This interaction can occur in-person (for example, during a scheduled period at school) and/or virtually through various media (for example, by email or interaction through the virtual platform).
  - The required, weekly synchronous learning period provides one opportunity for students to receive regular and substantive interaction, but courses must be designed so that regular and substantive interaction between students and teachers takes place throughout the course. The NYCDOE subject-certified teacher supervising virtual/blended instruction must frequently interact with, observe, and measure students' progress through course content, and they must provide meaningful feedback on student work.
  - Interaction between the NYCDOE subject-certified teacher and the student must be frequent enough to allow many opportunities for students to receive instructional support and meaningful feedback on their progress.
    - The teacher must be consistently available to meet students' needs. Allowing the student access to a subject-certified teacher for support without ongoing, regular interaction is not sufficient, just as it would not be in any other course.
- The student demonstrates proficiency of the learning outcomes for the subject. For courses that culminate in a Regents exam, students are required to pass the Regents exam in the subject area in order to receive credit for the course.

> For virtual/blended courses that commence on or after September 1, 2024, students will no longer be required to pass the culminating Regents exam in order to earn course credit.

Daily/Weekly Instructional Time

As described in the [High School Academic Policy Guide](#) (page 78), all high school students must be programmed for 27.5 hours of in-person instruction per week, exclusive of lunch. As an exception, students above compulsory age who are in the fifth year of high school or beyond may be programmed for fewer than 27.5 hours per week.

> Only schools with approved SBVL courses, schools with VLC courses, School Without Walls (02M395), and Virtual Innovators Academy (08X636) may count off-site, virtual/blended synchronous learning time toward the required 27.5 hours per week of instructional time. This time may include synchronous learning time that occurs during or outside the traditional, in-person school day. All synchronous learning time must be scheduled in STARS. The following additional policies apply for these programs:

> - Schools must program students for at least one synchronous instructional period every weekday (Monday through Friday) for the purposes of daily attendance. Schools cannot provide a schedule in which students have an entire weekday off school.
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> - Parents of each participating student must be informed of the student's daily start and end times as part of the opt-in process. See Parent Opt In. Students are expected to attend school for all scheduled periods within these daily start and end times. All required courses and mandated services must be provided within the daily start and end times communicated to parents as part of the opt-in process. Courses that are supplementary to a student's regular program (e.g., additional courses as make-up, electives, or enrichment) may be offered outside of a student's agreed upon start and end times in the same manner as for students participating in traditional, fully in-person learning.

Parent Opt-In

Effective September 1, 2024, schools are required to obtain parental consent for students to participate in virtual/blended courses. Parents[8] have the final say in this determination; schools must not make the decision on behalf of the parent. Students whose parents do not opt their student in to the offered virtual/blended course must be scheduled for a traditional, in-person program. The parent opt-in policy applies to all virtual/blended courses, including those that are part of SBVL and VLC.[9]

Schools must implement a parent opt-in process as described below.

Step 1: Letter of Interest (May/June)

As part of regular procedures for communicating with students and families about course offerings for the following school year, schools have an opportunity to promote virtual/blended opportunities to families. Schools planning to offer virtual/blended courses for the 2024-25 school year must communicate to parents no later than the end of school year, explaining the learning environment (virtual/blended), location, and any other known course information at that time. The goal of this step is to help schools and families plan for the fall, offer parents the opportunity to ask questions, and gauge an initial level of interest. Parents are not required to submit their final decision at this time, and schools' virtual/blended course offerings may change before September. Schools should send the letter of interest to only those parents whose students might be eligible to participate in a virtual/blended course offering (e.g., if a course is planned for students entering grades 11 and 12, send the letter to those parents only).

Schools must use the Letter of Interest (Appendix A) for this communication unless they have already completed a substantially equivalent exercise to inform parents of their virtual/blended plan for the upcoming school year.

Step 2: Parent Opt-In Form (August) – Updated July 2024

Schools must send the Parent Opt-In Form (Appendix B) as soon as the details of the intended course offerings are finalized and no later than August 30, 2024, to inform parents of the virtual/blended courses offered to their student in term 1 of the 2024-25 school year.

> Schools are encouraged to send the Parent Opt-In Form as early as possible to receive parent consent prior to the start of the term. Schools should request that parents return the form no later than **September 4, 2024,** so that responses can be used to finalize schedules for that term. Students **must not** participate in the virtual/blended courses without a parent opt-in form.

Schools must complete the Parent Opt-In Form so that it contains all the details about the course that a parent would need to know to make their decision (e.g., which days the course meets on site and off site, the specific

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[8] The term "parent" means the student's parent(s) or guardian(s), or any person(s) in a parental or custodial relationship to the student, or an emancipated minor, or a student that is 18 years of age or older and does not have an IEP.

[9] The parent opt-in process described in this guidance does not apply for School Without Walls (02M395) or Virtual Innovators Academy (08X636) as parents opt into a virtual/blended program as part of the admissions process.

meeting times, the assigned teacher of record, the days students are expected to participate using an internet-connected device, etc.).

Schools may distribute the form through mail, email, or a Microsoft Form, and responses returned through these formats are all sufficient for parent consent. Schools are encouraged to use multiple methods of communication to ensure that parents understand the opportunities available to their students. Schools should request that the form be returned prior to the start of school so that responses can be used to finalize schedules for that term.

Schools must distribute the Parent Opt-In Form at least one month prior to each term in which virtual/blended courses are offered. Parental consent for participation in a virtual/blended course in a previous term must not be considered consent for participation in future virtual/blended courses.

Schools are welcome to collect parental consent in August for the entire school year provided that the necessary course details can be communicated to parents. Schools choosing to follow this timeline must still provide opportunities for students to return to a traditional, in-person program prior to the start of each term.

> Schools are encouraged to engage with parents about virtual/blended course opportunities as early as possible, especially if such opportunities are new to the school community. Schools should consider multiple methods of communication with families to discuss virtual/blended options, such as mail, email, phone calls, and in-person meetings with parents.

While parents make the final decision regarding participation in virtual/blended courses, schools should also identify opportunities to connect with students about virtual/blended learning opportunities so that student voice may be considered in decisions about course offerings.

Attendance

Attending school, participating in class, and demonstrating understanding are all essential components of student learning and achieving success in school and in life. Schools must make every effort to remove barriers to attendance and to help every student attend and learn every day.

The definition of "present" for the day during the 2023-24 school year is as follows:

- In Person: Student attends (is physically present in the classroom/school learning environment) at least one full instructional period during the school day.
- Remote: Student attends (is present virtually for) synchronous or asynchronous instruction for the equivalent of at least one full instructional period during the scheduled program day.

Consistent with the DOE's 2023-24 attendance policy, absences must be coded with the appropriate reason code. Students are to be indicated as learning remotely using *reason code* '65' for present and *reason code* '35' for absent.

Refer to the SY2023-24 Attendance Policy for further guidance.

Taking Attendance for Virtual/Blended Courses

All synchronous learning must be scheduled in STARS. Schools must take attendance for synchronous learning as follows:

- **Subject/ Period Attendance (SPAT):** As per Chancellor's Regulation A-210, in grades 9–12 and in departmentalized schools (a school that is organized around academic subject departments), attendance also must be recorded for each period of scheduled instruction. For program tracking, it is strongly recommended that schools use ATS to record period attendance. For further guidance in setting up period attendance for your school, please refer to Taking Attendance - ATS - DoE-WiKi (nycenet.edu)
- **Daily Attendance (ROST):** As per Chancellor's Regulation A-210, Student daily attendance must be recorded in Automate the Schools ("ATS") each day. Students are considered present if they are attending one full instructional period, that includes if they attended a virtual class scheduled during the school day.

Review the scenarios below for additional guidance.

Scenarios	Period Attendance (SPAT) for Virtual class	Daily Attendance (ROST)
Student is scheduled for both virtual class and in-person class for the day: Present for the virtual class, but absent for all the in-person classes	Take attendance for each class and flag the attendance for virtual class with reason code 65 (P) or 35 (A)	Students are considered present if they are present for one instructional period. If a student is ONLY present for the virtual class, use reason code 65 (P) to identify that they are present remotely for the day.
Student is scheduled for only virtual classes for the day	Take attendance for each class and flag the attendance for virtual class with reason code 65 (P) or 35 (A)	Students are considered present if they are present for one instructional period. Use reason code 65 (P) or code 35(A) to identify that they are present or absent remotely for that day.
Students scheduled for weekend classes	Take attendance for each class and flag the attendance as virtual class with reason code 65 (P) or 35 (A)	No daily attendance needed for weekend session. Do not consider weekend classes that are scheduled during an unused period on Friday afternoon as part of Friday Daily Attendance.

Multilingual Learners/English Language Learners and Students with Disabilities

Schools must take affirmative steps to ensure that Multilingual Learners/English Language Learners (MLs/ELLs), students with IEPs, and students with 504 plans can meaningfully participate virtual/blended learning.

Multilingual Learners/English Language Learners

- Students must not be denied participation in virtual/blended courses based on language proficiency or perceived proficiency.
- All ELLs and former ELLs must be provided their mandated units of study of bilingual education, English as a New Language (ENL), or alternative pathways during the regular school day.
- Plan to provide testing accommodations (i.e., time extension, separate location, bilingual dictionaries, glossaries, etc.) to ELLs, as needed, on English language arts (ELA) and content-area assessments (i.e., mathematics, science, and social studies).

See the Policy and Reference Guide for MLs/ELLs for additional guidance.
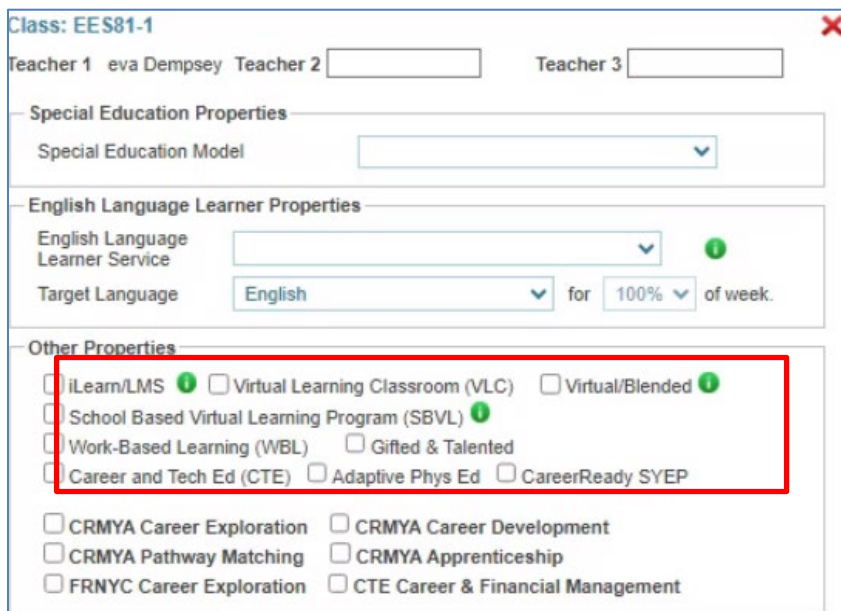
Students with IEPs and 504 Plans

- Students must not be denied participation in virtual/blended courses based on disability.
- Schools must arrange to provide all testing accommodations, modifications, and supplementary aids and services recommended on the IEP/504 Plan.
- Related service schedules may need to be adjusted as needed to prevent disruption in service caused by the student's schedule change.
- As needed, IEP meetings should be held to consider whether the student requires changes to the recommended program or services (e.g., SETSS to support a general education virtual course or modifications to assistive technology) to reflect the virtual/blended program.
- If the student's needs cannot be met in the virtual/blended program (including with any recommended accommodations/supports), the student must be offered a full, in-person program.

STARS Programming

Virtual and blended courses are regular courses. Virtual and blended courses are coded in STARS the same way as traditional, in-person courses, using the standardized High School Course Code Directory to reflect the academic content.

The following policies apply:

- The STARS schedule must include all synchronous learning associated with the course, regardless of whether students are on- or off-site. Asynchronous learning is not scheduled in STARS, as students are learning independently and may be working at different times.
- Use "REM" as the location in which students are participating from a non-school location.
- Schools must select the appropriate section properties for all virtual/blended courses. This information is used for compliance and reporting purposes:
  - o Virtual/blended – use this property for all virtual/blended courses, regardless of whether they are part of a centrally-coordinated program. **This property is used for compliance purposes and officially denotes all virtual/blended courses.**
  - o **In addition to** the virtual/blended section property, select additional properties as applicable:
    - School Based Virtual Learning (SBVL) - use this property **only if** the course is an approved SBVL course
    - Virtual Learning Classrooms (VLC) - use this property **only if** the course is offered through the VLC program
    - iLearn/LMS - use this property for all courses that integrate with iLearn or other learning management systems and platforms that rely on STARS rosters. This property may also be used for courses that are not virtual/blended.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

General

1. **If a course routinely incorporates the internet, computers, learning management systems, or other technology, is it automatically considered a blended course?**

   No. Using internet, computers, or other technology as resources in the classroom or as supplements to the curriculum does not necessarily make a class a blended course. Blended courses involve direct instruction by a NYCDOE subject-certified teacher through internet-connected devices and traditional, in-person learning.

   Example of blended instruction: Students receive instruction in global history through a combination of virtual learning and in-person instruction. Students are scheduled to participate in the synchronous virtual lessons during an evening period while they are off-site, and discussions and other learning activities with the teacher of record are scheduled to take place on site at the school.

   Non-example of blended instruction: Students receive the entirety of instruction for global history on site at the school. Students have access to the course syllabus, lesson plans, practice assessments and supplemental materials through a learning management system so that they can complete homework and study from home. This is **not an example** of blended instruction. Rather, this is a course that incorporates technology.

2. **How should schools ensure that virtual/blended courses are of comparable quality and rigor to traditional courses?**

   Virtual/blended courses are regular courses and must meet the same academic policies required of traditional classroom courses. Schools must maintain structures for regularly evaluating new and existing courses, including virtual and blended courses. This may include reviewing the course syllabus, curriculum map, scope and sequence, sample lesson plans, assessments, and other associated resources. Schools may choose to use the Course Review Form as a way to ensure that a course is being implemented appropriately. The form is not required but may be helpful in assessing and documenting the course's alignment with academic policies.

   In addition, schools must maintain appropriate documentation for all their courses. When requested, schools must be able to produce evidence of what is taught in their courses. Schools can document course content in a variety of formats, such as curriculum maps, scope and sequence guides, lesson plans, course directories, and pacing guides for each course they offer. These documents can substantiate that a course:

   - Was taught by the teacher of record (and as such should include the teacher's name)
   - Was aligned to NYSED's commencement-level learning standards in a given subject area
   - Provided sufficient content during the term in which it was offered to require 54 hours of instruction and to merit a credit in accordance with State and City policy

   For more information on what the syllabi for virtual/blended courses should contain, see Documenting Course Content. For more information on other types of documentation that may be requested for virtual or blended courses, see question 10 on documenting student-teacher interaction and question 11 for information on documenting instructional time and rigor.

3. **Who determines the content of virtual/blended courses?**

Virtual/blended courses must meet the same academic policies as traditional, in-person courses. The NYCDOE subject-certified teacher overseeing the course is responsible for examining the curriculum and assessments of the virtual course to ensure the content aligns with commencement-level learning standards and is of comparable scope and rigor to other courses offered by the high school awarding credit. **This is true even if content is provided or supplemented by a vendor.** The teacher of the course, just like in a traditional course, must still ensure the course is aligned to NYSED's commencement-level standards.

The alignment of the course components to commencement-level learning standards must be clearly outlined in a teacher-developed syllabus. The teacher must adapt or supplement the course content as needed to ensure that the course adequately addresses NYSED's commencement level learning standards. See the Documenting Course Content guidance document for more information about course syllabi.

4. **Do vendor-provided platforms and content need to be pre-approved for use in credit-bearing courses?**

In general, no. Schools may choose which vendor-provided platforms and content to incorporate into virtual/blended courses as long as they are compliant with the NYCDOE's privacy and security standards. Teachers may also create their own content. However, for virtual/blended courses used as credit recovery, schools must use NYCDOE pre-approved virtual content vendors. See the guidance on Credit Recovery for additional information.

For all virtual/blended courses, schools are responsible for ensuring that the courses align with commencement-level learning standards and are implemented according to the guidance provided in this document. See question 3 above for more information.

See Enterprise Management Request Application (ERMA) to determine whether a vendor is compliant with the NYCDOE's privacy and security standards.

5. **Are schools required to offer virtual/blended courses?**

No, schools are not obligated to offer virtual/blended courses. As for all courses, principals make the final decision about virtual/blended course offerings based on student needs, community interest, staffing, and other operational and logistical considerations.

6. **What should schools consider in deciding to offer virtual/blended courses for the first time?**

Schools interested in offering virtual/blended courses should first gauge interest from the school community about whether this method of teaching and learning would benefit the students. Below are key questions schools should ask themselves and be able to answer before offering virtual/blended courses:

- Is there interest from parents, students, and teachers in a virtual/blended course offering?
  - If a school is unsure if a virtual/blended course offering would be desired, they could survey the school community at the beginning of the school year to gauge broad interest. The survey should ask questions that give the school a sense of what courses their community is interested in offering, what learning environments are most popular, and what days of week/times would be preferred.

- How will the virtual/blended course work with the school's master schedule?

  o When schools are considering offering a virtual/blended course, they should consider how to serve the students who opt out of the offering or want to switch mid-term. Will the school need another teacher who is teaching the same course in person? Will the classes run concurrently? What room in the school will they use? What technology will they need?

  o Schools are responsible for communicating a clear add/drop policy to parents and students before the start of the school year. Schools are advised to start slow by offering one or two virtual/blended courses while they refine their processes.

  o Schools should consider setting deadlines for parents to send back the Letter of Intent and/or Parent Opt-In Form that allows them enough time to finalize student programs.

7. **Are students responsible for any expenses or equipment related to virtual/blended courses?**

No, students must not be asked to pay to take any courses that are offered by their school, including virtual/blended courses.[10] Schools that offer virtual and/or blended instruction must ensure that students enrolled in such instruction have access to the digital, internet-connected technology and internet access necessary to receive and participate in instruction.[11]

Role of the Teacher

8. **Who can teach virtual/blended courses?**

Virtual/blended courses must be instructed by a NYCDOE subject-certified teacher; this person is the teacher of record in STARS. As for all courses, teachers of virtual courses must be linked to a myGalaxy personnel record using the Teacher Reference in STARS.

Schools and teachers should consult UFT contracts and follow procedures related to teaching virtual/blended courses. Contact your senior field counsel with any questions.

9. **What is the role of the NYCDOE subject-certified teacher?**

The NYCDOE subject-certified teacher is responsible for course materials, monitoring student learning, and awarding grades. The NYCDOE subject-certified teacher is also responsible for:

- Creating the course syllabus and ensuring alignment to standards
- Providing the student with opportunities for regular and substantive interaction
- Regularly monitoring student progress, supporting the learning, and actively providing feedback throughout the course
- Regularly monitoring students' instructional time to ensure that students are on track to receive 54 hours of instruction during the term
- Determining if the student met the learning outcomes of the course
- Awarding the student interim grades and a final grade at the end of the term, at which point the grade may also confer credit(s)

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[10] NYCDOE Chancellor's Regulation A-610

[11] NYSED P-12 Education Committee November 30, 2023 Memo

10. Can the NYCDOE subject-certified teacher use a vendor-provided syllabus as proof they taught the course?

No. While a vendor-provided syllabus may serve as a strong template, it is the teacher's responsibility to add or remove lessons as appropriate and to ensure that the course is aligned to NYSED's commencement-level learning standards. The teacher also ensures that the course is of comparable scope and rigor to other courses offered in the school.

If the course syllabus is adapted from a third-party platform or content provider, the NYCDOE subject-certified teacher must clearly indicate their name as the teacher of record on top and must also indicate the year and term the course is taught.

In addition, syllabi for all courses should include the following:

- **Identifying information**, including the school name or DBN, teacher's name, course title, course code(s), and school year/term
- **Timeline of the course,** including when the course meets, for how long, and the beginning and end dates of the course
- **Number of credits the course is worth**
- **Materials, texts and other resources required for the course**
- **Course objectives and their alignment to specific NYSED grade-level learning standards**
- **Assessments and grading policy,** including make-up work policies.[12] Schools do not need to include school-wide grading policies in course content documentation, provided the information is shared with students and families separately.

Strong virtual/blended course syllabi also include the following:

- **Where, when, and how students receive instruction.** Students can participate in and receive credit for virtual/blended courses at school or at an off-site location, during the school day or after school hours.

  o **Example:** The syllabus for an off-site virtual course states that students are to participate in virtual instruction for one hour at least three times a week, for at least 54 hours total during the term.
  o **Example:** The syllabus for an on-site virtual course states that students are to complete virtual learning in the computer lab on Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays during period 3.
  o **Example:** The syllabus for a blended course might state the days and times when students receive instruction on site, and the expectations for when and how students are to complete the virtual learning off site.
  o **Example:** The syllabus for a blended course incorporating asynchronous learning outlines the expectations for the on site instruction and provides a description of the asynchronous activities, including the amount of time these activities should take each week and mechanisms of tracking student engagement in these activities.

- **When students interact with the subject-certified teacher of record, beyond scheduled, synchronous instruction.** As in any course, interaction between the NYCDOE subject-certified teacher and students must be frequent enough to allow many opportunities for students to receive instructional support and

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[12] Schools are discouraged from including non-mastery measures of performance in students' grades. For more information about determining final grades, see the Grading Policy Toolkit.

meaningful feedback on their progress. The syllabus must specify when and the frequency with which this interaction will take place and how it will take place (e.g., in person, over email, through a platform).

- **Additional technology considerations.** A strong course syllabus outlines if students are required to use special equipment to access virtual learning, the directions for how students log in to the virtual platform, and information on how students can access administrative support, if needed**.**
- **Privacy statement:** It is important for students and families to be aware of their rights, and the ways in which their information might be shared. See the Cybersecurity page on the InfoHub for information on the Children's Virtual Privacy Protection Act (COPPA) and the Children's Internet Protection Act (CIPA).

For additional information on developing syllabi, see the Documenting Course Content guidance document.

11. **Does holding office hours for students suffice as regular and substantive interaction?**

No. The NYCDOE subject-certified teacher overseeing the course must **actively** monitor students' progress and provide feedback to students in the course, just as a teacher would in any other course. As part of this regular and substantive interaction, all courses must include one synchronous learning period per week. If the teacher holds open, optional office hours for students to attend as needed, it must be in addition to an active form of monitoring student progress (for example, emailing the student, conducting virtual check-ins, or having recurring synchronous meetings).

12. **How does the teacher assess and grade student learning in virtual/blended courses?**

As with all courses, the NYCDOE subject-certified teacher overseeing the virtual/blended course is responsible for designing or selecting assessments which align with the learning standards and learning outcomes outlined in the course syllabus. Assessments may include projects, exams administered within or outside the virtual platform, portfolios, and other measures of student competency.

Student grades must be based on student proficiency in the learning standards and competencies addressed in the virtual/blended course. As in any course, grading policies for virtual/blended courses must be documented prior to the commencement of the course and be clear to students, families, and staff. Students' grades in courses are determined and awarded by the NYCDOE teacher of record.

The teacher's gradebook may be requested at any time, as with any regular course. Every gradebook must include the teacher's name, course title, year and term the course was offered, student name, clear marks for all grading periods, and a clear final grade. Schools must have systems in place to maintain prior grading policies and copies of teachers' gradebooks. Schools must not use Regents exam scores as a factor in student grades.

> For virtual/blended courses that commence on or after September 1, 2024, students will no longer be required to pass the culminating Regents exam in order to earn course credit.

13. **How do teachers document and award grades for virtual/blended courses?**

Virtual/blended courses are regular courses and must meet the same academic policies as traditional courses. The NYCDOE subject-certified teacher overseeing a virtual/blended course must provide feedback regarding student's proficiency in course objectives, including awarding interim grades in STARS and a final grade in STARS at the end of the term. Refer to question 12 for more information.

14. **If the digital platform calculates grades and students can see those grades on the digital platform, do teachers still need to provide feedback to students and enter grades in STARS?**

Yes. The NYCDOE subject-certified teacher overseeing a virtual/blended course must inform students of their progress and enter grades in STARS. Virtual platforms and learning management systems do not replace STARS. See question 9 and question 12 above for more information.

15. **Can non-subject-certified teachers supervise students in a study hall in which they are completing activities related to virtual/blended courses?**

Yes, provided that the NYCDOE subject-certified teacher is still the teacher of record in STARS. All virtual and blended courses must be instructed by a NYCDOE subject-certified teacher with whom students have regular and substantive interaction. As for all courses, teachers of virtual courses must be linked to a myGalaxy personnel record using the Teacher Reference in STARS.

Teacher(s) other than the subject-certified teacher of record may supervise students in a computer lab, take attendance, manage equipment and technology, etc. See question 33 for information on how to add a non-subject-certified teacher or other staff member to the course in STARS.

16. **Can teachers supervise a small group of students (up to 10) learning virtually as their professional activity assignment?**

Yes.

17. **Many virtual vendors provide their own instruction and assessments. Do courses with these features require a subject-certified NYCDOE teacher?**

Yes. A NYCDOE subject-certified teacher must instruct all virtual/blended learning courses. While vendors may offer a variety of resources for students in virtual/blended courses, vendor-provided learning activities do not replace the subject-certified teacher. The NYCDOE subject-certified teacher is responsible for ensuring the course syllabus aligns to New York State commencement-level learning standards, providing regular and substantive interaction, monitoring student progress, providing feedback, and awarding interim and final grades.

18. **Can the NYCDOE subject-certified teacher be a teacher from another school, in another building?**

Yes.[13] An NYCDOE subject-certified teacher from one school can oversee a virtual or blended course at another school, even if the schools are in different buildings. The subject-certified teacher overseeing the course is always the teacher of record in STARS, even if they are from a different school. See the Systems section of this document for information on how to program these students in STARS using shared instruction.

See question 36 and question 37 for programming teachers and students in Virtual Learning Classroom (VLC) courses. Note that SBVL courses are offered by a school's own teachers to their own students.

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[13] Schools participating in SBVL may utilize shared instruction within the same campus only.

19. Can the subject-certified teacher overseeing a virtual/blended course be a subject-certified teacher from a non-NYCDOE school?

No. Virtual/blended courses must be taught by NYCDOE subject-certified teachers.

20. How many students can a teacher oversee in a virtual/blended course?

The class size limits that apply to traditional courses also apply to virtual/blended courses. Contact your senior field counsel with any questions about the contract.

Implementation

21. Is there a minimum number of on-site minutes for virtual/blended courses?

There is no minimum on-site time requirement for virtual/blended courses. Throughout the course, students must have enough in-person and/or virtual interaction with the NYCDOE subject-certified teacher so that the teacher can adequately assess student progress and proficiency in content.

22. Can students pace through virtual and blended courses in less than 54 hours and still receive credit?

Virtual and blended courses must meet the same academic policies as traditional courses. Virtual/blended courses must provide students with 54 hours of instruction per credit, just like in regular courses. **Virtual/blended courses also must be of the same scope and rigor as all other courses offered by the high school.** Schools may choose to use the Course Review Form as a way to ensure that a course is being implemented appropriately; see question 2 for more information.

> While credit-bearing courses must provide the opportunity for 54 hours of instruction per credit, individual students may move through the coursework more quickly or slowly. **However, students may not complete virtual and blended courses in significantly less than 54 hours per credit.** To do so is a clear violation of City and State policy.

It is the NYCDOE subject-certified teacher's responsibility to monitor students' progress through the course and identify if students are pacing through the course too quickly or too slowly. If many students are pacing through a virtual/blended course in less than 54 hours, the school must reassess the course content to determine if it is of the same scope and rigor as other courses offered by the high school.

23. Can schools schedule a student to complete a virtual/blended course in less than a full term, so other students will also have access to that same account or license?

No. Students participating in virtual or blended coursework must be given the same amount of time to complete the course as they would for any other course at that school. Schools may not pressure students to accelerate their virtual learning so that another student can use the platform. Students must be given the full term to complete the course, as they would in any other course.

24. Must students complete a virtual/blended course in a single term, or can students complete a virtual/blended course over an extended period of time?

No. Students must be programmed in STARS and receive a final grade in all classes, including virtual/blended courses, at the end of a term. Schools should have clearly defined procedures to ensure that students' final course grades are entered in STARS in a timely manner. Schools may not delay awarding a final grade beyond the course's originally scheduled term.

If a student does not meet the learning outcomes of the course by the end of the term, the school must award a failing grade and provide make-up opportunities as appropriate.[14]

25. When do students need to pass the Regents exam in order to earn credit for a virtual or blended course?

In order to earn credit for any course, including virtual and blended courses, students must demonstrate they have fully and successfully met the learning outcomes of the course.[15]

For virtual and blended courses ending in August 2024 and prior, students must pass the Regents exam in the subject area at the end of the term if they have not already passed an exam that counts toward a diploma in that subject area.[16] Students must pass at least one assessment in each of these areas to graduate: ELA, math, science, and social studies.

For courses that are part of a sequence, this requirement applies to the last term of instruction in that sequence.

- **Example:** Global History is a four-semester, four-credit sequence of instruction that culminates in the Global History Regents exam.

  - If a student is taking the fourth semester of Global History (HGS44) as a virtual or blended course, and if the student has yet to pass any social studies Regents exam, then the student must pass the Global History Regents exam at the end of that term in order to receive credit for the course.
  - If a student is taking the fourth semester of Global History (HGS44) as a virtual or blended course, and the student has already passed the US History Regents exam, then the student does not need to pass the Global History Regents exam in order to receive credit for the course. This is because they already passed a social studies assessment.
  - If the student is taking the second semester of Global History (HGS42) as a virtual course, the student does not have to pass the Global History Regents exam in order to receive credit for that course. The Regents exam does not affect the student's ability to earn credit for the first, second, or third semester of instruction.

- **Example:** Students are enrolled in a virtual Algebra II/Trig course. The course culminates in the Algebra II/Trig Regents exam. For students who have already passed a math Regents exam (for example, Algebra I or Geometry), the Algebra II/Trig Regents exam is not required for graduation. Students who are

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[14] See "Earning Credit after Previously Failing a Course" in the High School Academic Policy Guide for additional information.

[15] Per NYSED Commissioner's Regulations Part 100.5.

[16] See High School Academic Policy Guide for additional information.

enrolled in this virtual course do not need to pass the Algebra II/Trig Regents exam in order to receive credit for the course.

- **Example:** A student failed the second semester of a Living Environment course, but they passed the Living Environment Regents exam. The student is retaking the second semester of instruction as a virtual course. Since the student already passed the required Regents exam, they do not need to retake the exam in order to receive credit for the virtual course.

If a student's virtual/blended course credit is contingent on their Regents exam score as described above, the final grade must not be entered into STARS until the Regents exam has been scored. These students should receive a failing grade at the end of the term if they do not pass the Regents exam. Future Regents exam scores cannot be factored into the student's grade at a later date.

Aside from the requirement outlined above, Regents exams cannot be a factor student's final grades, as described in the Grading Policy Toolkit.

> For courses that start on or **after September 1, 2024**, students are no longer required to pass the culminating Regents exam to receive credit for a virtual/blended course. Regents exams will continue to be prohibited as a factor in course grades.

26. **Does an approved Regents appeal meet the requirement for passing the Regents to earn credit for a virtual or blended course as described in question 25?**

No. Students without IEPs must earn scores of 65 or higher on the Regents exam to receive course credit for virtual and blended courses, and students with IEPs must earn scores of 55 or higher.

Students may become eligible for appeals after earning course credit in all courses in a sequence leading to the exam. However, they may not use the appeal to earn course credit in virtual/blended courses. See Appeal to Graduate with a Low Score on Regents Exam for more information on appeals.

> For courses that start on or **after September 1, 2024**, students are no longer required to pass the culminating Regents exam to receive credit for a virtual/blended course.

27. **Can science laboratory requirements be met through virtual or blended courses?**

Yes. Part 100.5(b) has been amended to allow for the 1,200 minutes of lab experience to be met through a combination of hands-on and simulated laboratory experience; prior to this amendment, virtual lab experiences to meet this requirement were not permissible.

28. **Can students take physical education (PE) as a virtual or blended course?**

Yes, in rare cases. Physical activity is an essential component of physical education. Therefore, virtual/blended courses may be used only on a student-by-student basis in situations where a student is deficient in credits due to failing previous semesters of PE or temporarily unable to participate in physical activity for health reasons. For example, virtual/blended PE courses may be appropriate for the following students:

- A student who is temporarily medically excused from engaging in physical activities

- A grade 12 student who failed PE in grade 11
- A student who is receiving medically-necessary instruction
- A student who has a deficiency in PE credits that cannot be accommodated during the students' school day program.

Virtual and blended PE courses must follow all of the policies outlined in this document and the Physical Education (PE) Guide, including the requirement for substantive interaction with an NYCDOE PE-certified teacher and aligned to commencement-level learning standards. Just like all courses, virtual and blended PE courses must meet the requirements described in question 2. Courses that follow the daily PE model, including virtual courses, must have synchronous instruction daily. Students may take more than one PE course in a term if the additional course(s) is for elective credit or to make up a course failed in an earlier term. Students may not accelerate or "bank" PE credits to avoid taking PE in later grades.

All students must complete the required NYC FITNESSGRAM assessments in person each semester that they are enrolled in a virtual/blended PE course unless medically unable to attend and/or participate.

There are limited, approved programs where PE is provided almost exclusively through virtual/blended courses, such as schools with approved SBVL, School without Walls (02M395), Virtual Innovators Academy (08X636), and some medically-necessary instruction (MNI) programs. If your school is interested in offering virtual/blended PE courses, and it is not one of the approved programs listed, reach out to your OSWP Boro Inbox.

29. **Are virtual or blended courses only to be used for credit recovery?**

No. Credit recovery is one use for virtual courses, but it is not the only reason a school may choose to offer virtual or blended courses. Reasons for offering virtual and blended courses include but are not limited to the following:

- To offer differentiation for students who are not successful in a traditional classroom setting or prefer a virtual setting
- To provide a new approach to learning content that the student previously failed
- To schedule students who are deficient in credits for additional courses
- To provide students who have demonstrated the ability to work independently the opportunity to participate in advanced classes
- To provide students the opportunity to take courses the school does not currently offer
- To familiarize students with virtual platforms and technology in a structured setting
- To help students develop time management skills and the ability to work independently in support of their college and career readiness

Parent Opt-In – <mark>*Updated July 2024*</mark>

30. If a school does not receive a response from the parent by the first day of school (or term), what should they do? (<mark>Updated July 1, 2024</mark>)

Schools should make every effort to engage parents in understanding the benefits of and expectations for virtual/blended courses so that parents can make an informed and timely decision. If a school does not receive a response by the first day of the term, the student **must not** participate in virtual/blended course(s), and the school must provide a traditional, in-person program. If the parent returns the opt-in form after the first day of the term, the school may accommodate the student's participation at their discretion provided there is minimal disruption to the student's learning.

Systems

31. Can students try a virtual/blended course without being scheduled for it in STARS?

No. Students must be scheduled for **all** courses in STARS. Students cannot try a virtual course without being scheduled for it STARS, in the same way that students cannot try a traditional classroom course without being scheduled for it in STARS. Schools also cannot provide login credentials for students to do a "trial run" of a virtual course without being scheduled for it in STARS. Schools cannot retroactively add a virtual/blended course to a student's transcript**.** Schools must award marking period and final grades to all students scheduled for virtual/blended courses according to the school's marking period calendar.

32. How should schools schedule students participating in virtual/blended courses at a different NYCDOE school?

The shared instruction function in ATS enables students to remain on the register of their home school while being programmed for and receiving a final grade in STARS for a course taken at another DOE school. To schedule students who are fully enrolled at their home school but are taking a virtual/blended course at another NYCDOE school, the shared instruction school must:

- Verify that the Shared Instruction grade code "999" is available in the Grade Code Table (Table 110) by using the TBLD function in ATS.
  - o If grade code "999" is not available, schools should request grade code "999" via RQSA – GRC.
- Add ATS grade code "999" to an official class.
  - o At least one official class must have the grade code "999" before schools can initiate shared instruction.
  - o Schools should either add grade code "999" to an existing official class or create a new class for shared instruction students, using the CMOD function.
  - o If creating a new official class, the official class code and name should align with the school's official class naming mechanism.
- Initiate shared instruction for students using the ATS function SHIN.
  - o From the BIOS menu, type in the student's ID number and select SIAD (option 15).
  - o Enter the shared instruction 'Admit' date and the shared instruction official class.

- o An aggregate number of students attending shared instruction in your school can be viewed on the STAT menu and RSHI report.
- Program students for appropriate course sections in STARS Admin.
    - o Shared instruction students will display with a status of 'ST'.
    - o Shared instruction students appear in STARS Admin Custom Reports 3.21 to 3.25.

School Based Virtual Learning (SBVL)

33. What is SBVL?

School Based Virtual Learning (SBVL) was created for schools to establish virtual learning models created by and for their school communities. School Based Virtual Learning courses are taught by current teachers and are attended by current students. Schools apply to participate, and all policies described in this document apply to courses that are part of SBVL.

Virtual Learning Classrooms (VLC)

34. What is Virtual Learning Classrooms?

Virtual Learning Classrooms offers NYCDOE middle and high schools the opportunity to enroll students in remote classes that are not offered at their school, including world language, Advanced Placement (AP), and elective courses. These classes are taught synchronously by centrally-hired and trained teachers before, during, and after the regular school day.

High school VLC courses must comply with all policies for credit-bearing virtual and blended learning as described in question 2. Middle school VLC courses for high school credit must comply with all policies for virtual and blended learning and the policies for awarding accelerated middle school course credit, as described in the Middle School Academic Policy Guide.

35. What is the role of the VLC teacher?

VLC courses are taught by NYCDOE subject-certified teachers who have the same responsibilities as subject-certified instructors of virtual and blended courses (see question 9).

36. Since VLC teachers are in a different location than the students they teach, how are they linked to the course in STARS?

The VLC subject-certified teacher overseeing the course must be added as "Person Not on Budget" in myGalaxy in order to link to the VLC course. See the Programming Virtual Learning Classroom (VLC) Courses wiki for details on linking VLC teachers to courses.

37. How are VLC courses set up and scheduled in STARS?

The students' primary school of enrollment must program students for VLC courses in STARS according to the following policies:

- Course Name: All VLC courses must include the letters "VLC" somewhere in the course name.

- Course Code: Schools must use course codes according to the guidance in the Middle School Course Code Directory and the High School Course Code Directory.
  - ○ Middle school accelerated course codes must not deviate from the standardized codes to ensure that eligible students receive high school credit.
  - ○ High school VLC courses must use 'VL' in the seventh and eighth course code characters.
- Schools must identify VLC courses by selecting "Virtual Learning Classroom (VLC)" in the "Section Properties."

See the Programming Virtual Learning Classroom (VLC) Courses wiki for more details.

APPENDIX A – Letter of Interest

[Date]
[Student Name (Student ID Number)]

Dear Parent or Guardian,

In the 2024-25 school year, your student may have the opportunity to learn in new ways by participating in virtual/blended courses. We are writing to share more information about these opportunities and ask if you would be interested in having your student participate. You will receive more detailed information and a formal opt-in form in August that will be used to finalize your student's schedule. Thank you for [insert instructions on how parents should get their response back to the school] by [insert deadline] to help us plan better for the following term.

[Instructions to be deleted before sending to letter out] This portion of the letter should be used as a guide for how schools can communicate the conditions of the course being offered to make sure parents get the information they need in order to make an informed decision in August. Schools should tailor this section to their needs and provide as much information as is currently available.

Here are some details about the virtual/blended course(s) that could be offered as an option to your student:

Course name(s):
Course meeting dates and times:
Type of learning environment:
- ☐ Virtual learning environment (i.e., all instruction is delivered virtually)
- ☐ Blended learning environment (i.e., some instruction is delivered virtually, some is delivered in person)

Location(s) where students will learn:
- ☐ On-site (in the school building)
- ☐ Off-site (e.g., from another location that is not the school building such as the student's home or a public library)

How is virtual/blended learning different from traditional courses?
In virtual/blended learning, teachers and students interact through technology for some or all of the time. Virtual learning is when all instruction takes place through internet-connected devices within the school building or outside of the school building. Blended learning is when instruction sometimes takes place in person and sometimes through internet-connect devices. Either way, your student will receive live instruction and support from a certified teacher on a weekly basis.

Does my student have to participate in virtual/blended learning?
No. Students are not required to participate in virtual/blended learning if you do not want them to. If you do not wish to have your student enrolled in a virtual/blended course, they will be provided a full, in-person program in a traditional classroom setting. Before finalizing your decision, you are encouraged to speak with the school to understand the opportunities provided by the virtual or blended courses being offered.

Please complete and return to the school by [deadline date] to indicate your intent to opt-in your student to virtual/blended learning for the [insert year].

I understand that my response is preliminary based on the information currently available. Should my student's school offer virtual/blended course(s), I will make my final decision when I receive the formal opt-in form in August and return it to my student's school.

Parent's name:
Student's name:
Student ID number:

Please indicate which statement best describes your thinking on virtual/blended course(s) for your student at this time:

☐ I plan to opt them in to virtual/blended course(s) they might be offered
☐ I plan to decline any virtual/blended course(s)
☐ I am unsure if I want my student to participate in virtual/blended courses

If you would like to share more information about your response, please share below:

_____
_____

If you would like to discuss your response, please reach out to [insert school contact].

APPENDIX B – Parent Opt-In Form

[Date]
[Student Name (Student ID Number)]

Dear Parent or Guardian,

Our school is planning to offer virtual/blended courses in the upcoming term. We are writing to share more information about these opportunities and ask if you agree to have your student participate. Detailed information about the virtual/blended courses offered to your student is provided below. Please provide your response by [insert date and details about how parents should submit their response].

How is virtual/blended learning different from traditional courses?
In virtual/blended learning, teachers and students interact through technology for some or all of the time. Virtual learning is when all instruction for a course takes place through internet-connected devices within the school building or outside of the school building. Blended learning is when instruction for a course sometimes takes place in person and sometimes through internet-connect devices. Either way, your student will receive instruction and support from a certified teacher.

Does my student have to participate in virtual/blended learning?
No. Students are not required to participate in virtual/blended learning if you do not want them to. If you do not wish to have your student enrolled in a virtual/blended course, they will be provided a full in-person program held in a traditional classroom setting.

When making your decision, discuss this opportunity with your student and consider your student's previous experience with virtual learning, their preferred type of learning environment, and your family's schedule. You should also consider how the course(s) can support your student's college and career goals. If you choose to have your student participate in virtual/blended learning and realize it is not the learning environment that best fits your student after the course has started, reach out to us to discuss what other options might be available. [Insert details about school's add/drop policy here including procedure, key dates etc.].

[Instructions to be deleted before sending letter out: This portion of the letter should provide all the course details that parents need to know in order to make their decision. If the offered course is blended, make sure that you are clear when it will meet virtually and when it will meet in person. If the student's schedule entails different start and end times than in a traditional schedule (e.g., half days, evening courses), explain in detail. Schools should tailor this section to their needs and provide as much detail as possible.]

Example table of scheduled virtual learning courses

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday	Independent work expectation
"Literature from the Harlem Renaissance" **Mr. Pollock** **Blended**	3:00-3:45pm At school Via internet-connected device		3:00-3:45pm At school	3:00-3:45pm At school Via internet-connected device			5:00-5:45pm At home Via internet-connected device	
"Computer Science" **Ms. Drezner** **Virtual**	8:00-9:00am At home Via internet-connected device	2:00-3:00pm At home Via internet-connected device		8:00-9:00am At home Via internet-connected device				

If you have further questions before making your decision, please contact [insert school contact] as soon as possible so as not to delay finalizing your student's schedule for the upcoming term.

Sincerely,
Principal name

Please indicate your decision below and return to the school by [insert deadline date and details about how parents should submit their response].

Please indicate whether you agree to have your student to participate in the virtual/blended course(s) described above. If you do not agree to have your student take the virtual/blended course(s), they will be given a full, in-person program.

☐ I agree to have my student participate in all virtual/blended courses

☐ I do not agree to have my student participate in virtual/blended courses

☐ [If parent has option to opt in to some, but not all, describe this option here]

Parent/Guardian's name:
Parent/Guardian's signature:
Student's name:
Student ID number:
Date: