

**Texas Commission on Virtual Education  
Report Draft**

**V2 Working Draft for November 30, 2022 Review**

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## I. OVERVIEW OF THE COMMISSION

The Texas Commission on Virtual Education (the “Commission”) was established by the 87th Texas Legislature, through [House Bill 3643](#), in the fall of 2021. The charge of the Commission was to develop and make recommendations by the end of the 2022 calendar year regarding the delivery of virtual education in the public school system and the provision of state funding for virtual education under the Foundation School Program.

This work, intended to develop a future policy roadmap for virtual learning opportunities and models, was undertaken at a critical moment of need and opportunity: the 87th Texas Legislature’s Senate Bill 15 ([TX SB15](#)), which established rules governing the delivery of virtual learning in public schools, will sunset in September 2023. Beyond this, there was growing post-pandemic demand for such options from a broad array of stakeholders, including students, families, and educators, as well as increased clarity in the field about how to effectively deliver such innovative learning experiences.

The 13-member Commission was appointed by Governor Greg Abbott, Lt. Governor Dan Patrick, House of Representatives Speaker Dade Phelan, and chair of the State Board of Education Kevin Ellis. It was chaired by Rex Gore, member of the State Board of Educator Certification, and co-founder and CEO of CleanScapes. Commission members also included a group of six bipartisan members of the Texas legislature, many of whom have served on the education committees in their respective chambers, an elected member of the State Board of Education, a current district superintendent, an Education Service Center executive director, a classroom teacher who chairs the Teacher Vacancy Task Force, and community and business leaders. Members additionally convened a funding workgroup, chaired by Senator Larry Taylor.

Members first convened in February 2022 and conducted nine meetings over the course of the year. All totaled, members heard 37 hours of testimony, learning from over 46 individuals representing Local Education Agency (LEA) staff including superintendents, teachers, and school leaders, state-level leaders, and subject matter experts, advocates, policy experts, parents, and students across the State and country. Meetings covered a broad range of topics, including:

- Existing Texas virtual education policies and outcomes data
- Research on virtual learning model quality, design, and implementation
- National examples of state virtual policy frameworks and providers
- Full-time virtual and hybrid school examples
- Supplemental virtual course provision
- Career and technical education connections with virtual and hybrid learning
- Support for special populations in virtual learning, including students with disabilities
- Teacher preparation, training, and support

This report, the result of these numerous hours of study and deliberation, aims to chart a course for the future of virtual education in Texas. It takes into account lessons learned from Texas’s own

virtual learning experiences, exemplars and expert perspectives across the country, and the voices of passionate stakeholders— from educators and school and system leaders to parents and students— desiring new and flexible options to meet diverse learning needs.

Respectfully submitted,

Rex Gore, SBEC (Chairman) — Governor Appointment	Hannah Smith, School Board Trustee — Governor Appointment
Bernie Francis, Business Community — Governor Appointment	Josue Tamarez, Master Teacher, Dallas ISD — Governor Appointment
Sen. Paul Bettencourt, District 7 — Lt. Governor Appointment	Sen. Larry Taylor, District 11 — Lt. Governor Appointment
Sen. Royce West, District 23 — Lt. Governor Appointment	Dr. Annette Tielle, Superintendent Del Valle ISD — Lt. Governor Appointment
Rep. Ken King, District 88 — Speaker Appointment	Rep. Matt Shaheen, District 66 — Speaker Appointment
Rep. Eddie Morales, District 74 — Speaker Appointment	Dr. Danny Lovett, ESC Region 5 Executive Director — Speaker Appointment
Pam Little, Texas State Board of Education — SBOE Appointment	

## II. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY AND MAJOR RECOMMENDATIONS

H.B. 3643 (87th Legislature, 2nd special session) created the bipartisan Texas Commission on Virtual Education (herein referred to as the "Commission"), which met over the course of eleven calendar months in 2022. After thoughtful consideration and with input gathered over 37 hours of testimony from state and national leaders, experts, agency staff, parents, and teachers, the Commission is pleased to submit the following report to the 88th Legislature as is required by statute.

This report includes the Commission's findings and recommendations to offer a unified framework for and revisions to advance Texas' virtual education policy to ensure high-quality options to meet families, students, and school system needs as well as position the State to address current and future demands for excellent, innovative education options for Texas students.

### **The Purpose and Opportunity for Virtual Education in Texas: A Key Tool for Achieving Our Vision for Students Now and In the Future**

*"We have always believed that opportunity and accessibility to education should not be limited. It should not be limited by location, whether it's rural or urban, and it should not be limited by privilege. Because, if you have visited our neck of the woods – and there's not a lot of money floating around out there – But it's very important to us that our kids are pressed and they work hard and they are given opportunities that they want to... pursue. So accessibility to great teachers and quality courses and content – that's kind of our calling card – should not be limited by anything, [by] location. And we believe that our organization offers an exceptional virtual option to kids and to school districts." - Summer Reel, Program Administrator, Guthrie ISD Virtual School*

After deep study of the topic and 37 hours of testimony from 46 experts, district and school leaders, teachers, students, and parents across our State and country, we contend that virtual learning can be a powerful solution to some of Texas's most significant education needs. Offered through a variety of delivery models, judiciously implemented, and with intentional planning and design, virtual education can be a critical tool for:

- Responding effectively to family and student demand for approaches that fit their learners' unique needs and interests;
- Bridging access to high-quality instruction amidst emerging and longstanding challenges, such as staffing shortages, local course availability, specialized interventions, and individualized supports;
- Offering flexible learning models that open up new learning opportunities (e.g., such as work-based learning, early-college credit, and independent study) in support of individual and collective schooling and workforce goals; and,

- Broadening professional models for teachers desiring career options, innovations, and advancement which will be helpful in addressing teacher recruitment and retention.

*“Today we sit here out of 48,000+ [total] students with only 289 virtual students... And some people have said, “well, that’s small. You guys should just eliminate it. You don’t need to do it.” But if you truly believe in a personalized approach for all children, if you truly want to touch all the children in your community in a way that their parents feel comfortable with, then we felt passionately that we should move ahead [with offering virtual learning].”- Dr Elizabeth Fagan, Superintendent, Humble ISD*

Tapping into the potential of this opportunity in the future will require recognizing and responding to lessons from our recent past. As Senator Taylor, Commission member and Chair of the Funding Work Group, noted: *“People have experienced the good, the bad and the ugly. And we’ve learned a lot.”* Pandemic-era remote instruction, born out of emergency response and rapidly executed without adequate preparation, did not have positive outcomes for a majority of students. It is not the blueprint for moving forward, nor is it indicative of what is possible.

*“I want to be clear. This commission is not on a fault finding or blame assigning mission. Rather, I want to thank and praise the unbelievably hard work the teachers, administrators, parents, students and so many others poured into this emergency response. **An unprecedented moment was met with unprecedented effort. And I... and we... applaud our educators and students for how they showed up in the midst of this pandemic. Now, however, we owe it to them to be much better prepared in the future.**” - Rex Gore, Chairman of Texas Commission on Virtual Education*

There were also significant concerns at the prior to and at the beginning of the pandemic about broadband access and device availability that would enable students to access remote learning. It is worth noting that thanks to the Legislature, state leaders, and the hard work of local communities, significant progress has been made with broadband access and device deployment.

*“We really can say that we went from being way off the mark in “one-to-one” in terms of devices as a state, to really becoming one of the top one-to-one states in the country with enough devices around the state of Texas to make sure that each student has one for virtual learning purposes.”-- Gabby Roe, Operation Connectivity*

Finally, policies will need to balance efforts to streamline program requirements and approval processes with strong systems for monitoring and a high bar for performance. We want to both

support existing high-quality Texas programs and encourage more Texas Local Education Agencies (LEAs), Education Service Centers (ESCs), and other providers to build additional programs. The State should also look to attract national high-quality providers of virtual programs, hybrid programs, and supplemental courses. This has the potential to build the capacity of local education agencies and position Texas as a national leader in innovative, high-quality virtual and hybrid education.

### **Recommendations To Coherently Advance Policy: Concrete Values and Objectives to Support Models and Enabling Conditions**

Texas has a rich history of support for innovative learning models (such as the Texas Virtual School Network, blended learning, and P-TECH). Prior legislation and policies were groundbreaking for their time and were helpful in getting virtual education off the ground in Texas. However, the Commission’s investigation into the current state of virtual education policy, in light of today’s new environment and new learning from the pandemic, found that stakeholders navigate a complex and sometimes confusing set of rules and regulations. There is a need for policies to offer a comprehensive and coherent vision that addresses access, quality, funding, teacher support, accountability, and addresses barriers to entry for students and LEAs seeking to serve them. Further, and reinforced by recent experiences with emergency remote learning during the pandemic, there is a lack of clarity on whether and how strategically implemented virtual education can achieve equitable and strong outcomes for different students and their communities.

Moving forward toward a more innovative and equitable vision will require directly addressing these pain points. This more integrated set of policies needs a strong, shared organizing frame, tied to clear objectives. Policies also need to clearly reflect values that came up time and again in testimony:

- **Accessible.** While we acknowledge that most students do and will continue to benefit from in-person learning, virtual education is an opportunity that should be widely and universally accessible to all learners who might benefit from it. Students, parents, and educators repeatedly noted that existing eligibility rules were rarely predictive of success in virtual environments. Some students who previously struggled in in-person settings flourished and grew, sometimes for the first time in their academic career. Others who flourished in-person struggled with the virtual setting. Enrollment decisions should be made by families in partnership with educators, not prescribed or limited by arbitrary caps, targets, or preconditions.

*“It’s been really disheartening for me and my child that she can no longer attend her public school of choice... My daughter actually did incredibly well working ... virtually. I saw her make a tremendous amount of progress.... Being able to pace herself in the virtual setting made a*

*tremendous difference for her. She ended up on an honor roll. She did so well... And it was just very disheartening to know that just because she doesn't excel very well with standardized testing that she would be kicked out of a place that she felt the most comfortable and where she felt she was really making progress. So we please ask that you help us to right this wrong.”*  
- Melissa Barbie, Texas parent

Further, policies must ensure that virtual programs effectively meet the varying needs of its diverse student population. There is compelling evidence that virtual learning can offer additional support and opportunity for some students not served well within more traditional, in-person models. For example, as Erin Mote, Founder of the Educating All Learners Alliance noted, *“When we are attentive to student participation in virtual education environments, students with particular disabilities like A.D.H.D. and A.D.D. have reported that they are much more engaged in learning experiences because it allows them to toggle on or toggle on in terms of engagement. It allows them to stop, take a break and re-engage. It allows them to do the work that they want to do in a way that they can meet their own needs.”* Virtual education providers can and must be held accountable for designing for universal access as well as offering the same level of services and supports for special populations, including addressing English Language acquisition and offering targeted special education and wrap-around services to students who need it.

*“The needs of our special education students as we move forward virtually are going to be some very unique needs that we're going to have to make sure we address all along the way.”*  
Dr. Danny Lovett, ED Region 5 Service Center

*“One of the things that we love about our program is that families who have students with IEPs love great hearts online because we are working with them in lockstep partnership to serve their student. Our special ed, our special education coordinator, not only provides services for those students with IEPs, they also meets every other week with parents to talk to them about their student academic progress. That is a freeing up of time and space that's very, very difficult to do in a brick-and-mortar setting.”* – Kurtis Indorf, Great Hearts Online

- **Simple and Consistent.** In order for district leaders and families to easily understand and embrace these innovative options for education, the policies need to be as simple as possible, and as consistent with in-person models as possible, while maintaining some flexibility for virtual learning’s unique elements outlined in testimony and in this report. Additionally, students should be able to move between virtual and in-person delivery models as needed, whether individually or for the purposes of site- or system-level emergency instruction. This will require local education agencies and educators to adopt clear rules and processes that support coherence and alignment, as well as communicate

common expectations, opportunities, and outcomes across models and formats.

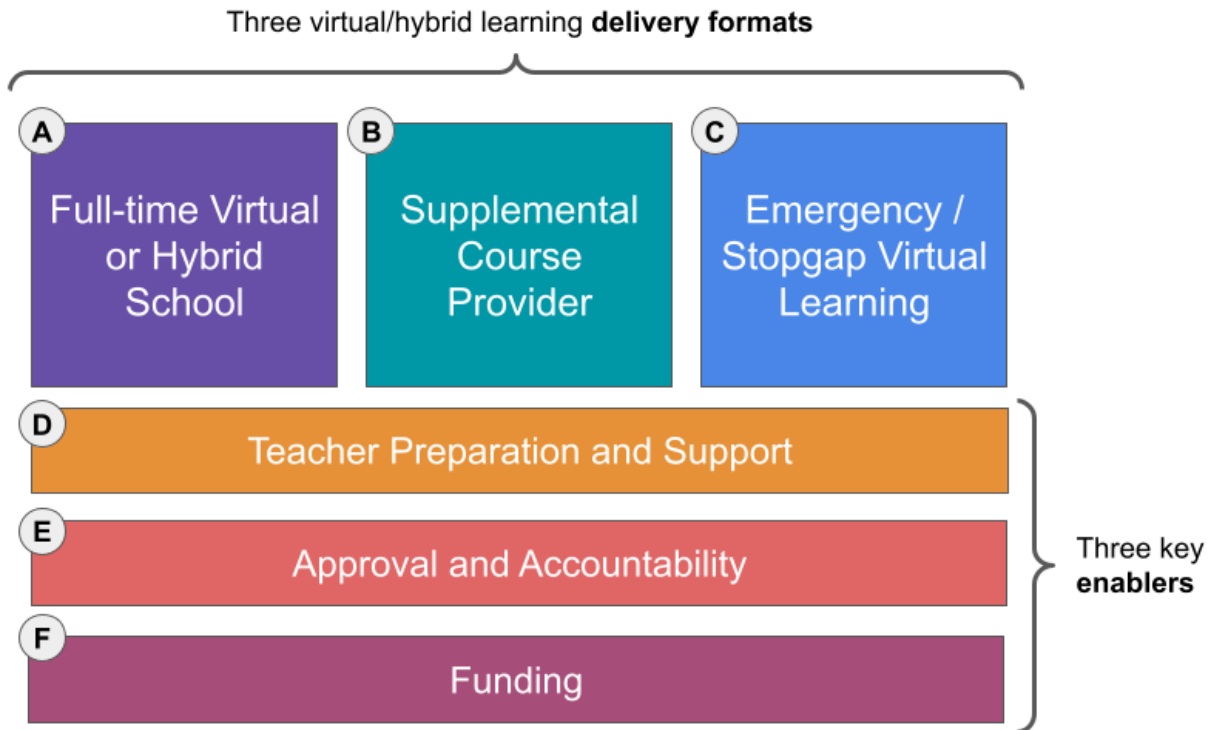
- **Excellent.** Standards for the quality of virtual education must be as high as those we hold for in-person learning. High expectations and support will be critical to achieving this— a point repeatedly confirmed by the testimony of exemplar practitioners. Instruction, undertaken by expert educators, must reflect careful planning aligned to research-based practices for online learning as well as the Texas Education Knowledge and Skills (TEKS). Delivery models must be supported by quality instructional materials and positive classroom cultures. Ultimately, our goal is that students enrolled in these options experience outcomes better than if they had remained in in-person environments, both because of the quality of learning as well as the fact that the experience offered them the conditions and using the approach— in-person, online, or otherwise— best fit for their unique needs as a learner.

With these aims and values in mind, the Commission’s major recommendations provide a new virtual education policy framework to support quality implementation by specifying:

- **Three virtual and hybrid delivery models:** full-time virtual or hybrid schools, supplemental course providers, and emergency/stopgap virtual learning supports.
- **Three key enablers across models:** funding, approval and accountability, and educator preparation and support.

The diagram below provides an overview of lettered report subsections that provide more detailed definitions, findings, and description of recommendations within each area.





The sections that follow detail major findings and specific, detailed recommendations to meet objectives aligned to the framework. A full list of all recommendations across objectives have been provided in Appendix C.

- A. *Increasing Access to High-Quality Virtual School Options To Ensure Families Can Choose the Best Modality for Each Student*
- B. *Ensuring Course Access and Promoting Work-Based Learning Advancement Through Streamlined Supplemental Course Catalog*
- C. *Ensuring Learning Continuity for Students and Schools in the Face of Known and Future Challenges*
- D. *Building Educator Readiness and Skill to Deliver Virtual Learning with Excellence*
- E. *Creating Aligned and Appropriate Accountability and Planning Expectations Across Schools, Regardless of Modality*
- F. *Establishing Adequate and Equitable Virtual Learning Funding Mechanisms to Support Clarity, Consistency, and Success*

**Conclusion: Moving Forward With Optimism and Commitment to Texas Learners**

The untapped potential of virtual education is immense: for districts, it offers the ability to offer more choice, recoup enrollment, and access talent and courses outside their local area. For teachers, fit, flexibility, and new opportunities for those who prefer to teach in virtual settings. For

students and families, a new supply of virtual and hybrid options for those who desire and uniquely need them. For rural communities, expanded access to specialty, AP, CTE, and difficult-to-staff courses. For the highly mobile and foster care students whose circumstances require frequent relocations, the ability to continue attending the same school with established teacher and student relationships where they will feel part of a community. For those students interested in a technical or career path that doesn't require a traditional four-year college, a hybrid schedule that allows for work-based learning, apprenticeships, and industry-based credentialing. For the medically fragile, the opportunity to receive a personalized, high-quality education whether they can physically attend in person or not. For students in special populations who uniquely thrive in virtual settings, improved instructional opportunities and personalized, learner-centered instruction.

The policy objectives identified by the Commission are both aspirational and achievable. They were drafted with the 5.4 million Texas public school students in mind (versus the interests of any one particular school district or any one region of or provider within the state). They must be considered in their entirety rather than as a set of pieces to be divided. Together, they would dramatically expand access to high-quality educational opportunities and ensure our current education system is built for the dynamic future of learning and work.

We acknowledge implementing these new policies will require strategic investments by the Legislature and Texas Education Agency, as well as time for learning and improvement as new programs are planned, launched, and expanded. And, we believe that once established, they will position our state as the national leader in virtual education and offer broad benefits to our rich and diverse Texas communities for decades to come.

*“When we passed the bill in 2013...It had everything to do with providing kids I represent in small schools the same equal educational opportunity that kids in the cities have... The whole point of the bill [was] equal educational opportunity for all kids. And I was very proud of it at the time it was working, was finally working, tremendously well... When the pandemic happened, that was the statute on the book that the Commissioner used to grant the waiver. And as our chairman pointed out, we weren't prepared to put kids in a virtual setting full time... **Now that the virtual genie is out of the bottle, it's not going back in. This is going to be part of our children's curriculum forever. And we need to do it right.**”-- Representative Ken King, Commissioner*

*“I firmly believe that Texas has the opportunity to be a leader and maybe the leader in terms of using digital learning opportunities to create new options for students and to improve student outcomes... I do believe there's much to replicate from elements of what other states have done and what schools in other states have done. There's also plenty to learn from within Texas as well, first to replicate what's out there and then to innovate, to make Texas the leading state for all K-12 students.” -- John Watson, Digital Learning Collaborative*

### III. MAJOR COMMISSION FINDINGS: ENVISIONING A FUTURE FOR VIRTUAL EDUCATION IN TEXAS SCHOOLS

The Commission heard testimony from education leaders, experts, and stakeholders across the State and Nation. Their compelling testimony helped inform our recommendations and served as inspiration on what is possible in public education in Texas.

In this section, we will report at a high level major findings from testimony in two inquiry areas:

- 1) What have we learned about the opportunity for advancing virtual education for students and communities in the State of Texas?
- 2) What have we learned about the “what” and “how” of policies needed to support this advancement?

#### [SIDEBAR]

##### Brief Definitions of Common Terms

- **Synchronous learning:** Students learn in real-time with their classmates, either in-person or online.
- **Asynchronous learning:** Students learn at their own pace (typically through slides, readings, a self-paced curriculum, or recorded video), either in-person or online.
- **Virtual school:** A school where all students attend virtually through online means. Typically, these programs have a mixture of synchronous and asynchronous learning opportunities.
- **Hybrid school:** A school where students attend class online and in-person. Typically, these programs have a mixture of synchronous and asynchronous learning opportunities.
- **Supplemental online courses** - A program offers courses, electives or advanced courses generally, that students take online in addition to their traditional school classes.
- **Emergency or stopgap learning** - The ability for LEAs to provide virtual learning due to campus, district, or student emergencies.
- **Remote conferencing**- Remote Conferencing is a mechanism by which remote instruction can be provided for students experiencing a temporary illness or who have been in close contact with someone with COVID-19.
- **Micro-Credential** - a short, competency-based recognition that allows an educator to demonstrate mastery in a particular content area or skill.

## **1) The Opportunity: Advancing Virtual Education in Texas**

**Existing Texas virtual education policy is layered and complex, and requires significant streamlining and revision.** Any assessment of the future of virtual education in the State must be placed within the context of current policy. While the pandemic accelerated awareness and interest in virtual learning opportunities, Texas policymakers have been advancing access to quality virtual education over the past 20 years. There are a variety of rules governing virtual learning already in place, spanning both pre-pandemic and pandemic timeframes.

- Pre-pandemic, access to supplemental and full-time virtual learning coursework was available to select students through the TEA-accredited Texas Virtual School Network (TXVSN). The State had also established statutes that allowed for “remote conferencing,” which allowed schools to provide instruction to students experiencing short-term absences.

The Texas Education Agency (TEA) provides online courses to eligible students through the Texas Virtual School Network (TXVSN). The TXVSN is made up of two components—the course catalog and the full-time online schools.

- The **TXVSN course catalog** works in partnership with Texas public schools to provide their students opportunities to enroll in high school, Advanced Placement, and dual-credit courses offered by TEA-approved catalog course providers.
- The **TXVSN Online Schools (OLS) program** offers full-time virtual instruction to eligible Texas public school students in grades 3-12 who enroll in one of the schools approved to participate in the program.

- With the arrival of the pandemic, Texas implemented emergency waivers and guidance for remote virtual learning, intended to support short-term deployments of fully virtual and hybrid models during school closures. As schools returned to fully in-person learning in 2021, and in response to demand from students, families, and local education agencies (LEAs) themselves, the 87th Texas Legislature passed Senate Bill 15 ([TX SB15](#), set to sunset in September 2023), allowing local education agencies to enroll up to 10% of their student body in their own virtual schools and establishing new rules for funding and accountability in these environments.

*“Each one of these [policies] has a different statutory home. And I think the idea of us creating some sort of streamlined common framework would be worthy of discussion.” Mike Morath, Texas Commissioner of Education*

At the time, these policies were forward-thinking and groundbreaking. Today, we have new technology, new research, new innovations, and new wisdom from our pandemic experience.

The existing policies were developed to address specific opportunities at specific moments in time, and do not currently add up to a coherent “whole.” They rely on many separate frameworks without clear definition or alignment and also pose significant limitations to enrollment and access, for learners, families, local schools, and potential providers. The Commission recognizes the need for one unified policy that specifies clear delivery models and sets up structures and supports for creating greater access, consistency and connectivity across online and in-person learning experiences and expectations, and excellence in design and implementation.

**Virtual education can offer a powerful tool for meeting significant current public education needs and for building future readiness.** The vast majority of Texas students learn best in person and will continue to opt for brick-and-mortar school options. A portion of families and students will continue to desire high-quality virtual and hybrid learning opportunities. Indeed, data show that some students thrive in these flexible learning environments. This success depends on both the quality of the programs and supports student experience as well as myriad other individual factors.

*“Everyone deserves an opportunity to learn, to be loved, to be cared for and to have the best education possible. I was first asked to be a virtual teacher, but then I chose to continue to be a virtual teacher because I felt like I could make a difference.... A lot of students need to be virtual because– I might get emotional about this– for medical reasons. I have a lot of students who come into my Zooms lying in hospital beds, with wires coming out of themselves with tubes. But they’re on Zoom every day. I have kids going to medical appointments, but they don’t miss a beat and they are walking into their medical appointment on Zoom every day. **Some students might not excel in a regular classroom, but boy, can they go above and beyond in a virtual setting.** Some students may be fearful for their safety, and a virtual environment is best for them. But every student deserves the very best.” - Kristy Whittaker, Virtual Teacher, Humble ISD*

Further, testimony from stakeholders pointed to numerous ways that high-quality virtual and hybrid learning opportunities could help solve long-standing challenges the State has faced. There is untapped opportunity to leverage virtual options to meet current needs, including:

- Providing access to critical courses and high quality instruction in our state’s many “course deserts” and teacher shortage hotspots.

*“When we look at rural access to advanced coursework, we as a state have spent billions on Internet infrastructure over the last year. [...] The low hanging fruit of virtual learning is improving rural access to things like eighth grade algebra [and] AP courses [which are taken by rural students at a fraction of the rate of urban and suburban kids]... Algebra One is considered a gateway to advanced math and science. It’s important for kids to succeed in late high school as well as in college. But only 15% of eighth graders in rural districts take Algebra*

*one. That compares to about 32% in suburban districts and 27% in urban districts. Frankly, today, it often isn't offered due to economies of scale. In some of these districts, if you only have a small number of students who want to take it, you know you can't dedicate a full time teacher. Virtual learning can solve that. You can get rigorous eighth grade math courses offered in that way." - John Hryhorchuk, Texas 2036*

- Allowing educators and families to work together to choose the best learning modality for individual student circumstances, such as students who are highly mobile or migrant, are parents themselves, have learning differences or medical needs, or with significant out-of-school responsibilities to meet economic needs of their families.
- Supporting schools and districts to use resources more efficiently, such as by helping extend the reach of site-based experts across multiple campuses, or through freeing up physical space through hybrid programming.

*"We wanted to begin to offer as many programing and career opportunities as possible in our school district... We're a two high school town, and with that we really couldn't afford to offer every program on every campus. And so we moved to a centralized CTE and college and career program model where we are moving kids around a little bit and sharing programs and teachers, but we're maximizing the dollars that we do have to ensure that they get as much opportunity as possible. Probably the biggest reason that we really jumped into virtual learning is the idea of flexibility. Everything we're going to talk about today is [about] the intent of making sure that we can create flexible schedules and time, that we have the ability to have kids in multiple locations if needed, to have flexibility and making sure that engagement is still occurring. We still want our Friday night football players to be football players, but to participate in CTE and also be in a virtual dual credit course if that's what they want to do. And that's been a philosophy of our community." – Dr. Justin Terry, Superintendent, Forney ISD*

- Helping districts, particularly in rural communities and via interdistrict partnerships, share resources across traditional boundaries, closing gaps in access and helping systems respond to changing conditions in more efficient ways. Additionally, catalyzing new virtual and hybrid programs in regions where districts might lack the resources and economies of scale to stand up new programs.

*"We have over a thousand districts. Some are small, some are large, some are fast growing, some are losing [students]. This will help smooth out some of that with efficiencies" - Commissioner Senator Taylor*

*"When we think of virtual education, we're all thinking about kid learning at home. Right. But understand, our Spanish model can be for both kids at home, but also kids in multiple districts. When I say I've got a teacher teaching, I could have a single teacher teaching a group of*

*students at the same time in Port Arthur, Fredericksburg, Wichita Falls. ... There's an aide in the classroom facilitating that. But that's a different kind of virtual instruction that really leverages our power to do this throughout the state.” – Dr. Danny Lovett, ED Region 5 Service Center*

Beyond addressing these issues, there is a clear opportunity to consider how the use of virtual approaches might “unlock” new resources to create new flexibilities and opportunities. For example, virtual and hybrid schools and courses can:

- Enable teachers to focus on personalized learning with more individual and small-group instruction time create greater work-based learning and apprenticeship opportunities to meet regional and state workforce needs and state goals established in Building a Talent Strong Texas.

*“So as you think about virtual education...and allowing a student to be at Lockheed Martin, to be at Bell, to be at USERRA is incredibly transformative for these students long term... [We] want to work on that... with our employers, at least in Tarrant County, to understand how they could offer real apprenticeship opportunities for these students”.-- Mattie Parker, Mayor (Fort Worth)*

- Allow educators with specialized expertise to reach more learners, as well as offer early-college credit and credentialing opportunities.
- Help build personal and system-wide digital competencies, which will be critical to both students and communities as they navigate dynamic emerging challenges in the future, including disruptions as well as the demands of advanced learning and evolving workplaces.

*“79% of [Texas public university] students are taking at least one class that is hybrid or either virtual. The same thing is true for public community and technical colleges– they have 83% of the students are taking at least one class in a virtual and hybrid model compared to 2001, which was only 15%. So the data is telling us that there's a strong need for this type of learning model so that we can get students ready for that college experience as well.”-- Dr. Olga Romero, Dallas Hybrid Prep*

*“It's not for every kid, but we do believe it's for a lot of our kids. And it's a skill that they also need to learn. Virtual education is a skill, whether it's now in the workforce or whether it's taking a higher education course, which almost 100% of bachelor's programs are probably going to require now.” – Dr. Justin Terry, Superintendent, Forney ISD*

Given their potential to help us solve for current and emerging obstacles, we believe all of these virtual strategies and options should be available for Texas learners and school systems.

We must move beyond policies that primarily address urgent, in-the-moment needs toward a forward-looking models that deliver quality outcomes and greater opportunity for all Texas students. Existing virtual models in Texas have mostly served students in specific, often uncommon circumstances, either individually through one-off, limited opportunities or collectively as a response to disaster. This stance does not prepare us for achieving more systemic, accessible and equitable use of this learning modality.

Further, we believe our education system was underprepared for pandemic-based remote instruction, which contributed to incomplete learning and learning loss for the vast majority of students. The responses, stood up quickly, generally lacked the required planning, staffing and scheduling, systems, and teacher supports and training to be successful. Outcomes of pandemic-based remote learning reflect this reality.

*“This commission should not draw a conclusion that virtual instruction is horrible for everyone. As a result of this data, what you should draw from a conclusion is we should avoid pandemics whenever, wherever possible.”- Mike Morath, Texas Commissioner of Education*

This need not be the reality as we look towards the future. Evidence suggests that, if intentionally designed in alignment with research-based best practices, virtual learning can produce strong outcomes. The drivers for quality are well documented, and we spoke with numerous educators, school leaders, and providers that show it is possible to implement them.

Finally, as we consider the future role of virtual education, we must also recognize another uncomfortable reality: current in-person learning models are not necessarily serving all students well, often with adverse impacts on low-income students and special populations. To quote Beth Rabbitt, CEO of The Learning Accelerator: “When we know that this bar is already failing so many, the right question isn’t ‘how well can virtual learning replicate in-person learning’ but rather ‘why might we pursue virtual learning to help us work in new ways to produce better outcomes for students?’ ”

## **2) Policies Needed to Support Advancement**

**Virtual delivery models vary; policies must address their differences to tap into unique value for learners.** Different virtual learning use cases exist, and there is significant confusion across terms and approaches. An overall policy framework is needed to clarify these use cases, and individual policies must match the purpose and goals of distinct delivery approaches.

*Quality virtual education encompasses a whole spectrum of models. This spectrum ranges from supplemental models like the Texas Virtual School Network course catalog, where a kid might take one or two additional classes, to hybrid models with some traditional in-person*



*paired with some asynchronous virtual learning, to full-time virtual models where a student takes all classes virtually. But to be clear, it never looks like an individual sitting in front of a computer staring at a screen for 8 hours. - Rex Gore, Chair of Texas Commission on Virtual Education*

Our policy must also address the fact that not all approaches are equally effective. For example, during the pandemic many schools turned to “concurrent” virtual instruction, where teachers provided instruction to both remote and in-person learners at the same time. In addition to being a model that is not supported by the research base (studies have found that virtual learning has lower outcomes when simply replicating in-person instruction), concurrent instruction proved to be exhausting and overly burdensome for teachers. As Commission Member and former Dallas ISD Teacher of the Year Joshua Torrez reflected, *“One of the reasons why we’re looking at teacher vacancies is that teachers were burned out by that whole experience of trying to serve students from home and also in the classroom. I can tell you from a teacher perspective that it’s one of the main issues.”*

Based on its review of the landscape, the Commission has identified three distinct delivery models as targets for policy advancement to support greater access and scale:

- **Fully virtual and hybrid schools:** Virtual and hybrid full-time school models in Texas can and must evolve beyond acting as “gap-filling” solutions for some students within exceptional circumstances to become high-quality, viable, and opportunity-creating approaches that can meet the needs of any student or family that might benefit from them. There are already quality schools operating in the State, but support and investment is needed to build more of them and effectively support those that are currently operating. Further we must establish a unified framework for their governance, aligned to research-based practices, as well as remove barriers to student access.
- **Supplemental online courses:** Access to supplemental courses is a critical lever for ensuring equal opportunity for students in many educational settings across the State, particularly in rural settings. Yet, time-intensive approval processes for courses and conflicting incentives for providers and local education agencies pose barriers to participation for courses, such as higher level math, that exist. We must increase access to quality courses that fill gaps in available experiences and offer new opportunities, attracting quality providers and increasing incentives for LEAs to refer students to them.
- **Emergency/stop-gap models:** Texas schools and systems must be prepared to deliver effective instruction through virtual means when faced with closure or extended student absence. Policies here must offer stronger definition, flexibility, and clarity on the cases (e.g. natural disaster versus individual need) and requirements for different emergency-learning use cases to ensure learner needs are met in these circumstances.

**All virtual models must be supported by common enabling conditions to ensure quality outcomes and support their development at greater scale.** While the Commission identified

distinct delivery models requiring specific policies, testimony pointed to additional common enablers critical to success.

*“There are some systemic factors that need to be in place in order for this to be successful. [...] This requires, again, a degree of intentionality in thinking and planning. And it's sort of a constant learning framework to make sure that you can deliver in an instructional environment. That is what our kids deserve.” -Mike Morath, Texas Commissioner of Education*

- **Educator preparation and training:** Testimonies from teachers offered strong evidence that virtual positions are a compelling option that can support professional growth and retention. At the same time, teachers need support to become excellent in these environments. While our standards for educational excellence must be consistent across in-person and virtual models, high-quality virtual and hybrid education require skills unique to teaching in online environments. Simply replicating in-person strategies will yield poor outcomes. Educators need targeted support and programs to build these skills now. Further, the State needs to develop a highly trained educator workforce capable of effective delivery of these models for the future. As previously noted, many teachers are feeling burdened with the task of catching up students who fell further behind during the pandemic. These demands combined with other administrative and professional development requirements have many teachers feeling overwhelmed. We strongly believe that professional development specific to virtual pedagogy should be incentivized and voluntary.
- **Accountability and planning supports for virtual and hybrid schools:** Our schools, whether in-person or online, must meet common expectations for excellence. At the same time, building a robust virtual education sector will require additional planning and investment to realize their promise and demonstrate success. Policy approaches must enable this planning and improvement alongside articulating common and high bars for quality across environments.

*“For 13, 14 years now we have been doing remote Spanish instruction through not just our region but throughout the state for schools that can't find a Spanish instructor.[...] We weren't that good 13 years ago. It's an acquired skill that takes a lot of work. We're pretty good now, 13 years later, and that's going to be important in all of our discussions as a commission and switching to a new way of doing things.” – Dr. Danny Lovett, Commission member and ESC Region 5 Executive Director*

- **Adequate and equitable funding:** Based on expert testimony and examples from within and outside of the State, investment in new schools for training, at-home and digital learning infrastructure, and the provision of materials and wraparound supports to students is often the same as or higher than traditional settings. Given this, virtual and

hybrid models require full funding on par with in-person schools; funding models should be fiscally neutral and enrollment-based across delivery models. We do not want to financially incentivize one modality over another, rather we want districts to partner with families to find the best fit for every student without budgetary concerns. Finally, further investments will likely be needed up front to help these models take root and grow towards sustainability. In the long run, the State can benefit from a more efficient use of both physical infrastructure and teacher resources. As Supt. Fagan of Humble ISD shared, there are open seats in her district's virtual classes that could be offered to students in other regions of the State that don't have access to that course.

*“There has to be the intentional allocation of resources to design and implement universal design for learning approaches with fidelity. You have to create opportunities for districts to have their own plans for this work, to personalize to their community needs to create feedback loops and reporting to ensure alignment to those goals.” -Erin Mote, Educating All Learners Alliance*

#### IV. OBJECTIVE A: INCREASING ACCESS TO HIGH-QUALITY VIRTUAL SCHOOL OPTIONS TO ENSURE FAMILIES CAN CHOOSE THE BEST MODALITY FOR EACH STUDENT

##### Summary of Policy Recommendations

**A1: Ensure Long-Term Provision Of Full-Time Virtual And Hybrid Schools With One Unified Policy Framework And Approval Process**

**A2: Conform Student And Local Education Agency Eligibility Requirements**

##### [SIDE BOX]

Key definitions:

**Synchronous learning:** Students learn in real-time with their classmates, either in-person or online.

**Asynchronous learning:** Students learn at their own pace (typically through slides, readings, a self-paced curriculum, or recorded video), either in-person or online.

**Virtual school:** A school where all students attend virtually through online means. Typically, these programs have a mixture of synchronous and asynchronous learning opportunities

**Hybrid school:** A school where students attend class online and in-person. Typically, these programs have a mixture of synchronous and asynchronous learning opportunities

Testimony repeatedly highlighted ways access to virtual and hybrid delivery models could offer specific, high-value opportunities for students in the state:

- 1) Many students and families continue to desire full-time and hybrid options— particularly those that keep them connected to their local schools and systems. They want these models to be of a high quality and to meet personal preferences (e.g. a desire for a more flexible schedule) as well as specific student learning needs.

*We continue to offer virtual learning because we had some parents and students come forward and say, you know, this has really changed my child's life or this has been a huge improvement. I had a mom, just one example of a high school student, email me and say that her person has struggled with mental health for as long as she's been in school. They really didn't know what to do. They didn't really have any ideas. He's dyslexic, [and] suffers from huge amounts of anxiety from being on campus in class. When virtual happened because of COVID, and she said it changed his life completely. And so we made special arrangements for that young man to continue both his virtual education, but also be able to come to campus and do well because he was far along in the welding pathway and that was what he aspired to do. – Dr. Elizabeth Fagen, Superintendent, Humble ISD*

- 2) Advocates for workforce and career-aligned learning see significant opportunity for virtual

and hybrid learning to meet regional and state workforce needs and state goals established in Building a Talent Strong Texas. These models offer up the flexibility needed for meaningful, hands-on workforce, and apprenticeship experiences during the school day as well as means for students to opt in to specialized training and career schools not locally available.

- 3) Given that they leverage online learning and require the building of digital learning competencies, many cited virtual schooling as a means for students to build skills for self-direction, responsible and literate use of tools as digital citizens, and communication necessary to successfully navigate their future jobs, relationships, and civic participation. It is hypothesized that this will lead to increased persistence rates and post-secondary completion.
- 4) Educators working within virtually supported models cited significant job satisfaction through remote and part-time roles as well as job-sharing across programs and regions (which allow them to specialize as well as reach more students).

*We have teachers in Irving, in Fort Worth, in rural Texas. And so... that flexibility on staffing allows us to attract a much broader talent pool and... to think about talent in a different way.*

*When SB 15 passed and we launched Great Hearts Online as a public charter school in Texas, **we had 1400 applications for at the time for 45 teaching jobs.** - Kurtis Indorf, Great Hearts Academies*

While Texas does have mechanisms for offering some of these full-time virtual and hybrid school options (e.g., via the Texas Virtual School Network (TXVN) and LEA programs approved by SB15), the Commission believes advancing progress here will require virtual policies to evolve beyond focus on addressing “gap-filling” solutions for some students within exceptional circumstances to become high-quality, viable, and opportunity-creating approaches that can meet the need of any student or family that might benefit from them. Strategies to support this include:

Articulation of one clear framework for virtual and hybrid schools to reduce confusion and fragmentation. Existing policy is subject to multiple laws and programs, these competing frames muddle understanding.

Improved understanding of research-based practices and supporting conditions expected of quality programs, as well as commitments to serving all learners. Testimonies highlighted the critical importance of ensuring virtual and hybrid school models reflected research-based practices in their design and implementation, including providing for special accommodations and access for learners requiring specialized services. In general, many of the elements of effective teaching and learning (such as those already the focus of the Texas [Effective Schools Framework](#), apply within these environments. However, more specifically, given these models rely heavily on online learning, schools need to ensure robust technological infrastructure and

baseline accessibility are in place (including home internet). Instructionally speaking, online environments often require more focus on building connections between learners and their teachers and peers as well as effective strategies for personalizing learning to ensure students remain engaged and get targeted supports needed to persevere when learning outside the classroom.

Removal of caps on enrollment or access exclusions to ensure virtual learning is a solution for any student or family who would benefit from it. Access to fully online schools in the TXVSN is currently limited to students in higher level grades, with prohibitions for students in grades K-2. SB 15 allowed districts to include access for grades K-2 in their new programs and districts have seen success with early learners in these grades. However SB 15, limits funding to those who were enrolled in a public school in the state the prior year (though exceptions do exist for dependents of a member of the United States Military or learners who have been placed in substitute care). Students wishing to enroll in local options under SB15 face similar enrollment caps as well as stipulations regarding prior year enrollment and performance and attendance standards.

These stipulations have the effect of limiting participation in programs, both posing challenges to sustainability for LEAs (who can not enroll a sufficient number of students, or are currently enrolling students regardless of funding) as well as access barriers for learners not meeting enrollment requirements, such as children who were temporarily homeschooled during the pandemic. The Commission additionally heard from Trinity Charter Schools, who serves a highly-mobile foster care population, that the enrollment caps precluded many of their students from the continuity of education so desperately needed for these kids.

*“Our goal for... for every student that goes to school with us in-person or is in care of the state [is that] we want to provide them a continuum of educational services. We don't want to disrupt their learning when they finally found something that was successful for them. ...When I talk about our virtual schooling, we have a hybrid learning model– predominantly our kids receive their education in our virtual program but because of the way that our campuses are laid out and we have campuses all over the state of Texas, our kids have the opportunity at any given time to come on site and receive in-person learning as well. **We have this really unique experience for our kids in care who have a disruption of learning to finally find something where it's not disrupted and no matter where they're moved from one day to the next.** [Usually] that kid's got to enroll in a new school, meet new friends, acclimate to new teachers. It is a it is anxiety inducing and it's going to be anxiety talking about it. So we're able to provide this continuum of care. We're able to provide this consistency and education. – Nicki Cornejo, Regional Principal, Trinity Charter Schools*

All of the testimony heard from Texas districts running programs as well as the guests from other states expressed that assumptions should not be made about who can or won't be successful in

the online model. Ultimately, decisions about enrollment should be made locally, in partnership with families. LEAs will need to adopt strong communication with families, emphasizing the distinctives of this modality and ensuring they understand that this is not an “easier” way to do school, but rather have the same high expectations of in-person learning while offering new benefits.

*“I would like to emphasize to you all that there is no one single type of student who does well, virtually. And so what we would really like to see is the flexibility to be able to offer that option to our students and families and for them to be able to make the decision for their student... we can't make assumptions about a certain type of student being able to do well successfully.”*  
 -- Bethany Weston, Teacher, Denton ISD K-8 Virtual Academy

**Powerful Examples from Field**

Increasing virtual and hybrid school opportunities will take time as well as ongoing orientation to learning and improvement. However, there are many existing programs that serve both as evidence for the viability of these models as well as examples to build from.

<p>Virtual School Great Hearts Online Lewisville ISD Virtual Academy as alternative</p> <p>[Mini case study in development]</p>	<p>Hybrid School Dallas Hybrid, Dallas ISD</p> <p>[Mini case study in development]</p>	<p>Workforce/CTE Rural School Innovation Zone</p> <p>[Mini case study in development]</p>
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**Specific Policy Recommendations**

**A1: Ensure Long-Term Provision Of Full-Time Virtual And Hybrid Schools With One Unified Policy Framework And Approval Process**

- Modify TEC Chapter 30A with a new, unified policy framework for full-time virtual, hybrid, and supplemental programs
- Establish a TEA approval process for full time virtual or hybrid schools that includes a Year 0 planning year to verify that high-quality design criteria are met (e.g., school leader selected, TEKS-aligned curriculum, teachers are supported and trained)
- Current Texas programs and providers with a prior successful track record receive a fast track for approval and a “grace period year” to operate while moving toward formal approval in the new system

**A2: Conform Student and Local Education Agency Eligibility Requirements**

- Enabling districts to partner with families to offer the modality that is best for each

student by ensuring eligibility requirements mirror in-person learning (i.e., no prior year student academic performance, attendance, or other such eligibility criteria or limitations on grade level)

*Related Funding Considerations Discussed in Objective F, Section IX:*

**F1: Establish a Fiscally-Neutral, Enrollment-Based Funding Formula for Full-Time Virtual & Hybrid Programs**

- Establish a fiscally-neutral, enrollment-based\* (enrolled and eligible) funding system to better enable the flexibility needed for approved full-time virtual and hybrid programs.
- Modify existing reporting structure to capture enrollment (enrolled and eligible) for virtual learners throughout the year.
- LEAs will report a student indicator with beginning and end dates in the virtual program, rather than reporting daily attendance for funding purposes. Student funding will be adjusted based on district in-person ADA rates, but not to exceed full time ADA rates.

**F2: Invest in Start-Up Grants and Agency Capacity to Provide Assistance and Ensure Quality for Full-Time Virtual & Hybrid Programs**

- Provide startup grants with technical assistance to incentivize and support LEAs in launching high-quality virtual/hybrid options, in alignment with TEA approval process
- Provide planning grant to ensure thoughtful planning and design similar to School Action Fund, Math Innovation Zone so that district meet the full-year planning grant for certification
- Provide TEA with additional FTE funding to adequately support new and existing virtual programs and related administrative needs)



## V. OBJECTIVE B: ENSURING COURSE ACCESS AND PROMOTING WORK-BASED LEARNING ADVANCEMENT THROUGH STREAMLINED SUPPLEMENTAL COURSE CATALOG

### Summary of Policy Recommendations

**B1: Ensure Long-Term Provision of High-Quality Options Through Supplemental Course Catalog**

**B2: Establish Course and Provider Reporting Mechanisms to Inform Choice-Making**

**B3: Require LEAs To Create Mechanisms for Informing Students and Families of Opportunities**

Key definitions:

**Supplemental online courses** - A program offers courses, electives or advanced courses generally, that students take online in addition to their traditional school classes.

Access to supplemental courses is a critical lever for equity and opportunity for students in many educational settings across the State. Prior to the pandemic, this access was primarily established via the creation of the State-run Texas Virtual School Network (TXVSN), which offers a high-school course catalog. The TXVSN Course Catalog meets a need for access to courses and flexibility that many LEAs, particularly small and/or rural ones, have challenges providing given personnel and scale issues. This is particularly true for specialized courses, such as foreign language, advanced mathematics and sciences, Advanced Placement, and Career and Technical Education. By giving students access to these courses, and in some cases by offering them through the catalog as providers or through direct collaboration agreements, LEAs are able to share resources across enrollment and employment boundaries.

*If we have four or five districts in the Rio Grande Valley and they have candidates who want to take calculus but they can't find a calculus teacher, let's take a great teacher and put them in a virtual setting to reach all of those students. There's no reason to deny instruction to individuals because we can't find a local teacher for them.-- Diann Huber, iTeach*

Beyond meeting specific student needs for LEAs and the students enrolled in them, supplemental courses also help educators to teach courses they may not be able to in a local setting due to demand; by working online, they are able to engage more students, extending the reach of their expertise. They also report experiencing higher levels of professional support. Danny Levitt, of Region 5 Education Service Center, reflected on what he'd heard from the ESC's virtual Spanish language teachers: *"The greatest enemy of great teaching for teachers is time. The benefit of the time gained here that they can devote to the practice of their craft is tremendous."* Levitt also noted that virtual teachers working across campuses have access to other experts in ways they did not in smaller schools, ESC educators reported that *"to be able to*

*just step outside my door and talk to somebody doing the same thing because something came up is priceless.”*

Supplemental courses also function as a way to bring in new providers and partners, such as credentialing and dual enrollment entities positioned to offer new credit building opportunities. John Hryhorchuk of Texas 2036 pointed to the opportunity for virtual learning to support other emerging State workforce goals and initiatives by offering post-secondary credentials, allowing students to graduate ready to earn economically competitive wages and with meaningful skills:

***“The efforts of the virtual education commission, the Tri-Agency Initiative, and the Commission on Community College Finance can all tie seamlessly together as we approach the next session. This requires that we organize around the common goals and strategies, with virtual learning remaining a component of meeting our long-term workforce needs.”***

Given these benefits, family and student demand for these opportunities remains incredibly high. Hryhorchuk reported on recent polling data, noting that while respondents indicated a strongly negative opinion for Zoom-based pandemic learning, the vast majority of respondents (88%) *“really liked the idea of having virtual learning serve as a supplement for offering courses in rural Texas that otherwise students would not have access to... People don't want to be forced into low quality online learning, but online learning, when it is an option that can improve the offerings available for students, is incredibly popular. This is one of the most popular things we've ever polled on at 2036.”*

However, testimony revealed significant barriers to meeting this demand and future opportunity, both due to time-intensive approval process and conflicting incentives for providers and local education agencies. Policy approaches must:

Reduce burden of approval processes and funding uncertainty to encourage growth in Supplemental course options that offer high-quality virtual experiences. While students can tap into opportunities through the TXVN, courses are currently limited to high school. Further, providers of courses (ranging from LEAs to nonprofits and other private entities working to award credit through an LEA) must complete an application, as well as, submit individual courses for review prior to inclusion in the statewide catalog. In testimony, they reported this process is time- and energy- intensive. Exploring how high-quality providers can be certified to offer courses in the catalog, rather than approving all courses individually, and focusing on outcomes data for the purposes of re-certification may reduce this burden.

Providers are also faced with funding instability. The TEA collects payment from the student's district and then pays the selected course provider. If the student successfully completes the TXVSN course, then TXVSN operations invoices the district or school for 100% of the course cost, but if the student is not successful or drops after the designated drop period, then 70% of the course cost is due. This system leaves providers open to risks outside of their own control, such as when students move out of their local LEA.

Increase local education agency incentives to inform families and students and encourage pursuit of supplementary opportunities. Any Texan public school may enroll in a TXVSN course, but they must do so through their home LEA and may take no more than three courses taken per semester. The student’s school district or open enrollment charter school pays the Texas Education Agency (TEA) for courses. Testimony pointed to two primary challenges. First, given LEAs pay for courses, there is some disincentive for pointing students to external courses. This is particularly true for smaller schools and LEAs where individual student enrollment may have a bigger impact on staffing and financial stability. Additional funding provided by the state might be helpful for mitigating this impact. Second, there is no standard expectation that families and students must be informed about supplementary opportunities. LEAs need clear guidance as to how and when they should provide students and parents with this information.

Powerful Examples Supplemental Course Access [SIDE BOX]

Insert some examples of programs/mini case studies		
LEA- Guthrie  [MINI CASE TO SHOWCASE IN DEVELOPMENT]	In-state- College Bridge	Emerging out of state- TN AP for All

<b>Specific Policy Recommendations</b>
<p><b>B1: Ensure Long-Term Provision of High-Quality Options Through Supplemental Course Catalog</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure long-term provision of supplemental course catalog by Phase-in of new supplemental course catalog statute as part of new, unified policy framework</li> <li>• Simplify process for course approval and course updates that allows the certification and regular recertification of a program or provider, while ensuring TEKS alignment, strong instructional design, and meeting the needs of special populations</li> <li>• Direct TEA to articulate expectations for TEKS alignment and rigor for high-quality instructional design</li> </ul> <p><b>B2: Establish Course and Provider Reporting Mechanisms to Inform Choice-Making</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Direct TEA to publish historic performance of full-time, hybrid, and supplemental providers to provide transparency for families and students about available options</li> <li>• Direct TEA to include virtual program outcomes in the overall LEA report card, but clearly reported separately</li> </ul> <p><b>B3: Require LEAs To Create Mechanisms for Informing Students and Families of</b></p>

## **Opportunities**

- Ensure an LEA parent notification requirement, like currently in statute (TEC 30A.007 a-1), is included in the new policy framework and enforced

### *Related Funding Considerations Discussed in Objective F, Section IX:*

#### **F3: Incentivize Supplemental Course-Taking to Remove Barriers to Participation, Particularly in Rural Settings**

- Incentivize the Supplemental Course Catalog by providing LEAs cost reimbursements for 3 years for enrolling students in supplemental courses subject to statewide and/or district cap that prioritizes rural and small LEAs (e.g. 30,000 / 45,000 / 60,000 enrollments)

#### **F4: Support multi-district, cross-sector, rural pathway partnerships**

- Modeled after the Rural School Innovation Zone, the Legislature should incentivize and support rural partnerships that multiply the high-quality college and career pathways available to students in each district and take advantage of the flexibilities of virtual and hybrid learning

## VI. OBJECTIVE C: ENSURING LEARNING CONTINUITY FOR STUDENTS AND SCHOOLS IN THE FACE OF KNOWN AND FUTURE CHALLENGES

### Summary of Policy Recommendations

#### **C1: Revise Existing Statute to Enable Clarity and Flexibility For LEA to Temporarily Deliver Instruction in Key Circumstances**

Key definitions:

**Emergency or stopgap learning** - The ability for LEAs to provide virtual learning due to campus, district, or student emergencies.

**Remote conferencing**- Remote Conferencing is a mechanism by which remote instruction can be provided for students experiencing a temporary illness or who have been in close contact with someone with COVID-19.

Providing instruction during individual or system-wide disruption is not a new challenge; indeed, Texas schools have long navigated short-term closures due to weather events and extended student absences due to personal circumstances. However, the depth and breadth of impact of the pandemic on in-person attendance and learning has shone a spotlight on the need to be better prepared to serve Texan students regardless of physical location. Our schools and systems must be ready to deliver effective instruction through virtual means.

*“I also have the unique perspective of living in southeast Texas since 2005, when Hurricane Rita devastated our region. In the last 16 or 17 years, the Texas coast is still [experiencing] fairly regular disruptions of face-to-face [learning]. Experiencing storms like Harvey and others have closed our schools and forced our students from their homes on a regular basis. You know, I'm hoping to work on this commission to lessen the learning loss our students might endure in future storms, not just on the Texas coast, but when ice storms and other events close schools throughout the state. And let me be clear... for the majority of students across the state, there's no long term substitute for caring, dedicated face-to-face teacher in the classroom. But nonetheless... **I think in addition to that, a viable, effective remote learning option in every school in the state can seamlessly deploy in an emergency situation on short notice and enhance and maintain instruction for all students. I think that would be a great benefit for the students, the teachers, the parents and the state as a whole.**” – Dr Danny Lovett, Commissioner and ESC Region 5 Executive Director*

In addition to raising awareness of the need, the pandemic also accelerated investment in critical infrastructure, such as broadband and device provision, foundational for delivering instruction remotely. Through the lived experience of educators, students, and families, it also built critical skills for engagement. These new capabilities have not yet been systematized in a future-looking

way, and the time is now to do it.

*Investments in virtual education now are the insurance that many states and districts are looking at in order to ensure that we never have the types of disruptions to education again that many of our communities have experienced. [...] What we know is that for students with disabilities, interrupted schooling has an outsize effect. And so the continuity that virtual education can provide, whether it's an emergency or as a consistent way to deliver services, is really, really important. – Erin Mote, Educating All Learners Alliance*

Testimony pointed to two critical, yet distinct use cases for emergency instruction. The first is campus- or district-level emergencies, in which an entire student body must be supported remotely due to a natural- or man-made disaster (e.g. pandemic, storm, threat to student safety). In these cases, entire classrooms or schools must quickly transition to remote learning. This requires solid infrastructure and readiness across an educational community. The second is individual, student-level circumstance (e.g. extended illness due to a medical issue, short-term family relocation, or travel for school or sporting event). In these cases, targeted virtual support is needed. While the overall scale of change is low, provision requires individual educators to attempt to meet the needs of students working across multiple locations.

In both cases, educators need to be prepared to move expediently. As Texas Commissioner of Education Mike Morath noted, building this readiness is “*distinct from engineering a full time remote learning environment for kids, because this is really about a short term burst of support that happens and you can't really predict it in advance.*” Given this, policy goals here should include:

Creating statutory definition that offers clarity on what defines emergency/stop-gap learning, under which conditions, for whom, and for how long. Currently, districts provide individual emergency support, and may receive funding for it, via a “remote conferencing” statute within the Student Attendance Accounting Handbook (SAAH). In addition to mandating a model that is difficult to execute (students may engage in concurrent instruction, but rather be offered dedicated synchronous support), this statute is limited in definition, flexibility, and clarity on the cases (e.g. natural disaster versus individual need) and requirements for different emergency-learning use cases. This definition should also encourage learning modalities that support quality in sustainable ways for learners and educators, including limiting the use of approaches such as concurrent that have been shown to be deleterious to both in-person and remote students when used on an extended basis.

Streamlining processes for school or system transition to emergency-learning or for filling staffing gaps created by such events. While districts may apply for waivers to move to emergency learning on a broader basis, approval processes can prevent swift action. As Dr. Lovett, Commission member and ESC Region 5 Executive Director, noted, “*The TEA works really hard on*

*this, but sometimes by the time you get a ruling on a waiver request, the emergency might be over.”*

Offers mechanisms and clear timelines for transitioning students in need of longer-term support to full-time virtual options. Emergency learning measures should be intended for short-term use. Currently, there is no clear statute or mechanism that helps schools know how or when to transition a learner in need of fully virtual learning for a longer period to an environment designed for that purpose, or how and when that learner can transition back.

### **Specific Policy Recommendations**

#### **C1: Revise Existing Statute to Enable Clarity and Flexibility For LEA to Temporarily Deliver Instruction in Key Circumstances**

- Direct TEA to expand opportunity for emergency or stopgap virtual learning and revise existing Student Attendance Accounting Handbook (SAAH) language to enable a more LEA-friendly emergency virtual education framework, including:
  - Allowing for flexibility in mode of delivery (e.g. teachers may provide recordings or stream instruction as long as it does not detract from in-person instruction), within a limited period of time with a TEA waiver to better support districts in quickly “turning on” emergency instruction
  - Stipulating more use cases for such emergency virtual learning (e.g., severe natural disasters)
  - Allow for students with long-term illnesses to access/move to virtual options if their LEA offers virtual learning

## VII. OBJECTIVE D: BUILDING EDUCATOR READINESS AND SKILL TO DELIVER VIRTUAL LEARNING WITH EXCELLENCE

### Summary of Policy Recommendations

**D1: Offer Research-Based Professional Learning Opportunities for Existing Teachers**

**D2: Embed a Framework for Virtual and Hybrid Learning Into Educator Preparation**

**D3: Create Micro-Credential Program to Incentivize and Recognize Virtual/Hybrid Expertise**

**D4: Providing Guardrails To Deliver Virtual Learning with Excellence**

Key definitions:

**Micro-Credential** - a short, competency-based recognition that allows an educator to demonstrate mastery in a particular content area or skill.

High-quality learning experiences should be rigorous, engaging, effective, and equitable across learning modalities. While the quality of learning and foundational actions should be consistent, simply replicating in-person strategies will yield poor outcomes. As Texas Commissioner of Education, Mike Morath, shared, *“You can be highly effective and have a very successful track record of delivering in-person instruction, but your expertise in crafting a remote instruction environment for any number of kids might not exist at all.”*

Teachers report investing just as much time, if not more time, with their students in these settings, but because of the lack of time spent on administrative and classroom management tasks, they could and needed to devote more energy to the strategies needed to help students succeed in these environments, including targeted remediation, coaching and supports for executive function, and various forms of direct student engagement.

*“When the pandemic started, it was something new for all of us. And I have a lot experience as a teacher, but that was... an adjustment curve for many of us veteran teachers. It doesn't matter who you are.” - Josue Tamarez, Commission Member*

Educators need support and programs to build these skills. The Commission heard from numerous teachers about their excitement in being part of this future. As professional learning expert Diann Huber noted, *“with regards to preparing teachers to instruct students in virtual and hybrid setting, Texas is behind other states.”* However, should this goal be prioritized, swift progress is possible: *“Texas has the statutory framework and the research to surpass any other state.”*

The opportunity to do this is threefold:



The current Texan educator workforce needs to be prepared to support virtual learning when operating in the face of emergency. As Commission member and Superintendent Tielle prompted: *“Where should we be in a crisis? Again, how do we provide an authentic curriculum and authentic learning setting for our teachers with appropriate professional development?”* Educators need access to course offerings that prepare them to deliver and demonstrate effective and engaging research-based practice. This access can be offered with economies of efficiency through State-run opportunities alongside more traditional, LEA efforts.

Virtual and hybrid competency must be integrated into high-quality professional preparation and development programs. There is an existing requirement in statute for educator prep programs to offer training for teacher candidates specific to the virtual environment, but additional work is needed to clarify the skills and competencies expected as well as ensure these programs are delivering teacher candidates fully ready to operate in fully virtual and stop-gap environments.

So here's what we know from research [is...] that if you want to move the needle, if you want to make a difference, you need to have training that is personalized to the needs, to the mastery level, to the role, ... to the grade level and content area of the teacher. It cannot be generic... If you're really looking at efficacy, having job embedded training, using the thing that you will be using in the context in which you will be using it makes a lot of difference... It needs to be not a “one and done” experience for teachers. – Heather Greenhalgh-Spencer, Texas Tech University Educator Preparation Program

Investment should be made in the long-term value of building a teaching workforce with a significant number that are highly skilled in virtual and hybrid delivery. This can be supported both by preparation programs as well as the offering of specific programs for current educators that allow them to build and demonstrate competency in this form of instruction. As we do so, we should be careful not to require or force teachers to receive this training on top of a long list of current requirements. However, we heard significant testimony from teachers who wanted to pursue virtual and hybrid roles in the long term. We should provide incentives for teachers who are interested in this new modality and offer a means for reflecting their competency on their SBEC record, such as through micro-credentialing.

*Texas can step up and be a national innovator based on lessons learned. Teachers and districts can effectively move from online to virtual and back if needed when we give our teachers the tools. Now, not every teacher wants to teach online, but for those that do we need to offer them microcredentials so they can it placed on their certificate so parent and districts know this individual has gone the extra mile to demonstrate competency to deliver [this] instruction.-- Diann Huber, iTeach*

## **Concrete Policy Recommendations to Achieve This Objective**

### **D1: Offer Research-Based Professional Learning Opportunities for Existing Teachers**

- *For teachers in our workforce already*, direct TEA to provide course offerings for existing teachers aligned with research-based best practice in high quality virtual/hybrid learning, engaging with key stakeholders and subject matter experts

### **D2: Embed a Framework for Virtual and Hybrid Learning Into Educator Preparation**

- *For teachers in the pipeline*, require SBEC to define and provide a framework for hybrid/virtual learning training that can be embedded into educator preparation programs (EPPs), including pedagogy and tools

### **D3: Create Micro-Credential Program to Incentivize and Recognize Virtual/Hybrid Expertise**

- Offer a micro-credential for teachers to be recognized for professional expertise in virtual education
- Incentivize, rather than require, accelerated uptake of high-quality professional development for interested teachers and districts, in the form of paying for the microcredential and a stipend for the time to earn it

### **D4: Providing Guardrails To Deliver Virtual Learning with Excellence**

- Teachers should not be coerced into teaching virtually, nor should teachers be forced to teach concurrently.

#### *Side BOX: Teachers perspectives on transitioning to virtual roles*

*It starts with relationships just like in a brick and mortar, just like when I stood in front of a group of kids in a classroom. It's a relationship. If kids feel like you are invested and you love them, no matter what the learning modality is, whether face-to-face or virtual, they're going to do things for you. They're going to work for you. Communication, we found early on, was extremely important. [...] I think I have the best job in the state. I get to teach kids from all over, every corner of the state. And it's been a blessing and it's been a it's been a really rewarding educational experience as a teacher. –Summer Reel, Program Administrator, Guthrie ISD Virtual School:*

*I'm sure many of you can recall the worry and the late nights or the sleepless nights that we experienced in preparing our state, our students, our families for this type of learning and hoping that we were doing the right thing. And I know it was an incredibly challenging thing for us to experience, but it was also during this time that I started thinking to myself, what if? What if we were able to actually provide a quality online school experience for children that was*

*fundamentally different than pandemic learning options. – Emily Sullivan, Teacher, Great Hearts Online*

*I really felt like all the time now that I've been teaching virtual that I knew my students so much more than even when I am a face to face teacher because I am in their homes and we were our own little family community. And it's I I'm right there in the home with those kiddos. And it's a connection like I've never had before. If we do class affirmations and those kids just love each other, I've had the parents say when we would meet at the park, you know, the kids would just run to each other and love on each other. And the families just say, I never knew how much they knew each other and loved each other. And we love to see that. So it's been a very positive experience for the families and for the kids and for me and I've just really enjoyed doing it and I look forward to continuing it. – Kristy Whittaker, Virtual Teacher, Humble ISD*

Powerful Examples from Field

School/District	State/Teacher Ed	Other Providers (e.g. DLAC, microcredentials)
DEVELOPING MINI CASE EXAMPLE	DEVELOPING MINI CASE EXAMPLE	DEVELOPING MINI CASE EXAMPLE

## VIII. OBJECTIVE E: CREATING ALIGNED AND APPROPRIATE ACCOUNTABILITY AND PLANNING EXPECTATIONS ACROSS SCHOOLS, REGARDLESS OF MODALITY

### **Summary Policy Recommendations**

- E1: Creation of Strong Approval Process With An Emphasis on Planning and Design**
- E2: Align Accountability for Virtual and Hybrid Programs with Existing In-Person Systems**
- E3: Publish Historic Performance of Virtual and Hybrid Providers**

Standards for excellence and outcomes should be coherent and consistent across delivery models. Texas students and families deserve clear reporting and information across all learning modalities that enable them to make the best choices given their needs and goals.

At the same time, as driven home by lessons from the pandemic, ensuring virtual and hybrid education opportunities meet these shared standards will require additional effort and innovation. In testimony from existing schools and programs with high success rates (i.e. completion, student growth and standards mastery), leaders consistently pointed to the level of intentionality, preparation, and skill needed to meet the unique pedagogical and technical demands as well as the flexibilities and opportunities of virtual models. Further, while there are best-in-class design components and practices for virtual education across environments, leaders also shared the need for local customization of approach. Some LEAs had success with home-grown materials, while others partnered powerfully with external providers. Some courses heavily leveraged asynchronous instruction, others were entirely synchronous.

The key takeaway here is that we need to allow LEAs to innovate and build models that work best for them and their communities while simultaneously ensuring quality planning and implementation.

*There's a lot that we can talk about in terms of information when we get down in the trenches is how does a district make this policy actually work? And it'll be different from district to district because we're all different. There's no one size fits all on that.--Chris Bigenho, Virtual Learning Academy, Lewisville ISD*

Policy actions to support this must:

Offer strong, transparent, streamlined accountability aligned to those required of in-person learning. Testimony pointed to a lack of clarity regarding accountability expectations for virtual learning. Decision-makers, including students and families and administrators, need to be able to clearly evaluate outcomes in ways that align to in-person schools. Programs should be rated separately, but if offered as one school in a district, be considered part of that portfolio of

performance. If a district is using a teacher of record from a vendor, the performance of the students enrolled with that vendor should become part of that vendor’s public performance record.

*“If I’m moving to a brick and mortar district, I can get a copy of their district report card. I think we just have hybrid and virtual. [...] as close as possible to a brick and mortar to a report card as possible. That way, parents, whether they’re looking at a virtual option or moving to a new community, they know what to look for and they know how to understand it, whether it’s virtual or brick and mortar.” – Speaker 4 in last session (identifying)*

Set up strong, upfront approval processes that emphasize planning and design aligned to research and the creation of new equitable opportunities for students. While existing programs with quality outcomes should continue to operate and grow, State approval processes for new programs must enable planning periods as well as technical assistance options emphasize building on research-based practices and that provide targeted support and connect teams to experts and peers.

Example: Virtual and Hybrid Learning Accelerator (mini case)  
[IN DEVELOPMENT]

Require virtual providers to clearly communicate student and family expectations, as well as establish proactive supports for expected and unexpected struggles. Upon enrollment, districts should be required to provide parents with a report of their online program that shows critical information about the model, curriculum, teachers of record, and public performance.

Families need a clear understanding of the challenges they might experience learning from home, as well as how providers will position themselves to address them. Virtual educator Summer Reel reflected on the fact that predicting who might or might not be successful in virtual learning is difficult: *“When I get calls from school and they ask me, how do you feel about working with junior high kids? And my answer is typically, you know, they have to prove to me that they can’t do it before I’m going to say this is the cutoff. It’s not for every kid. They struggle. There are 18 year olds who are struggling currently in the class. There are 12 year olds who are killing it and doing a fantastic job.”* During approval, virtual providers should show evidence of policies that are designed for inclusivity, clarity, and readiness for ensuring students don’t fall through the cracks.

### **Specific Policy Recommendations**

#### **E1: Creation of Strong Approval Process With An Emphasis on Planning and Design**

- Creation of a strong approval process that emphasizes strong planning and design (Year 0) with TEA technical support
- After upfront approval, require TEA to recertify virtual/hybrid programs at Year 3 and every subsequent 5 year marks based on clear, objective criteria of high quality performance (e.g Year 3, Year 8, Year 13)
- Current Texas programs and providers with a prior successful track record receive a fast track for approval and a “grace period year” to operate while moving toward formal approval in the new system

**E2: Align Accountability for Virtual and Hybrid Programs with Existing In-Person Systems**

- Virtual/hybrid programs should have an accountability system that is as close to the in-person accountability system as possible (e.g. A-F ratings)

**E3: Publish Historic Performance of Virtual and Hybrid Providers**

- Direct TEA to publish historic performance of full-time, hybrid, and supplemental providers to provide transparency for families and students about available options
- Direct TEA to include virtual program outcomes in the overall LEA report card, but clearly reported separately
- Request that the Legislature include a future interim charge to monitor the implementation of new virtual policy framework and related outcomes.

## IX. OBJECTIVE F: ESTABLISHING ADEQUATE AND EQUITABLE VIRTUAL LEARNING FUNDING MECHANISMS TO SUPPORT CLARITY, CONSISTENCY, AND SUCCESS

### Summary of Policy Recommendations

**F1: Establish a Fiscally-Neutral, Enrollment-Based Funding Formula for Full-Time Virtual & Hybrid Programs**

**F2: Invest in Start-Up Grants and Agency Capacity to Provide Assistance and Ensure Quality for Full-Time Virtual & Hybrid Programs**

**F3: Incentivize Supplemental Course-Taking to Remove Barriers to Participation, Particularly in Rural Settings**

**F4: Support Multi-District, Cross-Sector, Rural Pathway Partnerships**

**F5: Clarify Emergency/Stop-Gap Funding to Ensure Access to High-Quality Instruction**

Texas’s current virtual education and learning policies have been constructed over time and with different aims. This has resulted in complex funding mechanisms, uneven incentives, and a lack of centralized State-level support. To enable all of the other objectives, the Commission believes coherent revision aligned to the recommended policy framework will offer greater clarity and consistency as well as alignment of incentives to achieve goals.

Three key themes that emerged across testimony should guide Texas’s overall policy approach:

Quality virtual models are not less expensive than in-person ones, particularly in early days.

High-quality virtual learning requires significant expertise and wraparound student support. While these schools may not have the same physical capital expenditures as brick-and-mortar locations, they have additional costs for teacher training, digital infrastructure, and the provision of many of the same physical tools like science kits, books, and manipulatives. In addition, increasing access to these programs will require planning and scale-up costs. LEAs and providers navigate the development and launch of models, they need additional support and technical assistance, ensuring they have adequate time and capacity to plan and launch new, high-quality full-time virtual and hybrid school models.

*“We have kids that are in an HVAC program, for example, that at the beginning of the day are actually working for our Infiniti Air, our HVAC partner. They’ve received their Level One certification their junior year, for example, in the afternoon. They need the ability to go take a dual credit course or whatever it may be, because in the evening they’re taking and integrating into our HVAC 2 program community course that’s also on offered through Dallas College. And they’re doing that ... to even further their workforce experience while still getting the credit. So it’s outside the school day. We honestly don’t get paid for that right now from an ADA standpoint. But, you know, it’s what’s right for our students.” – Dr. Justin Terry,*

*Superintendent, Forney ISD*

*"We would advocate for the idea of support these schools at the same funding levels so that they can innovate and grow." -- John Watson, Digital Learning Collaborative*

Just because we are changing the modality of learning does not mean we should be funding students at a different level. Funding should be equal to the funding of other schools in the district (or state) to ensure students receive the high-quality instruction they would most benefit from regardless of where it occurs. Overall, approaches must be fiscally neutral (on per student cost basis), utilizing enrollment-based funding across full-time virtual and hybrid models. In addition, greater clarity and incentive is needed for provision of instruction during emergency closures and/or extended individual student absence from in-person environments.

*I've got two students: Chris A and Chris B. Chris A is in the classroom... [but] got a 35... But because [he's] in the classroom [physically], he's generating full funding.. Then Chris B is sitting there online, is working with the teacher, didn't quite get across the lines and got a 65 but wasn't quite there. Maybe [he] could have done a little bit more in this assignment. Maybe [he] missed one or two assignments. **[We get] zero funding for that student. That just is not right. The amount of work that goes into getting the student to that point versus the student who's getting funded just because they're in the classroom. So that's something to think about as we look at this.** —Chris Bigenho, Virtual Learning Academy, Lewisville ISD*

Additional support is needed to accelerate opportunities for populations and regions. Given its ability to connect learners to resources not available in their local setting, virtual learning is positioned to have outsized impact for learners in rural and low-income communities. Emphasis should be placed on opportunity creation in those settings.

- *Local education agency cost burdens associated with supplemental courses outside of districts must be reduced, at least in the short term.* Under current statute, students wishing to enroll in supplemental courses must do so through their LEA and enrollment is limited to three courses per semester. In most cases (accepting direct agreements between district partners) TEA collects payment from a student's district and then pays the selected course provider. Given LEAs pay for courses, there is some disincentive for pointing students to external courses. This is particularly true for smaller schools and LEAs where individual student enrollment may have a bigger impact on staffing and financial stability. Additional funding provided by the state at this point in time would reduce this impact, incentivize participation, and build broader awareness and demand for these options.
- *The State should offer focused support for growing rural collaboration across small districts.* Currently, the state's partnership incentive structure excludes small and rural districts— some of which are those most in need of support. To address this gap in policy, and inspired by and modeled after the Rural School Innovation Zone (RSIZ), the



Legislature should create structures that encourage rural partnerships to collaborate that multiply the high-quality college and career pathways available to students in each district and take advantage of the flexibilities of virtual and hybrid learning. By joining forces, while maintaining the independent district identity, rural districts will be positioned to strengthen both their education systems and regional economies.

### **Specific Policy Recommendations**

#### **F1: Establish a Fiscally-Neutral, Enrollment-Based Funding Formula for Full-Time Virtual & Hybrid Programs**

- Establish a fiscally-neutral, enrollment-based\* (enrolled and eligible) funding system to better enable the flexibility needed for approved full-time virtual and hybrid programs.
- Modify existing reporting structure to capture enrollment (enrolled and eligible) for virtual learners throughout the year.
- LEAs will report a student indicator with beginning and end dates in the virtual program, rather than reporting daily attendance for funding purposes. Student funding will be adjusted based on district in-person ADA rates, but not to exceed full time ADA rates.

#### **F2: Invest in Start-Up Grants and Agency Capacity to Provide Assistance and Ensure Quality for Full-Time Virtual & Hybrid Programs**

- Provide startup grants with technical assistance to incentivize and support LEAs in launching high-quality virtual/hybrid options, in alignment with TEA approval process
- Provide planning grant to ensure thoughtful planning and design similar to School Action Fund, Math Innovation Zone so that district meet the full-year planning grant for certification
- Provide TEA with additional FTE funding to adequately support new and existing virtual programs and related administrative needs)

#### **F3: Incentivize Supplemental Course-Taking to Remove Barriers to Participation, Particularly in Rural Settings**

- Incentivize the Supplemental Course Catalog by providing LEAs cost reimbursements for 3 years for enrolling students in supplemental courses subject to statewide and/or district cap that prioritizes rural and small LEAs (e.g. 30,000 / 45,000 / 60,000 enrollments)
- Establish threshold for supplemental courses using ratio of on-campus to supplemental courses to determine reporting structure (i.e.. majority of day on-campus then student is reported on-campus or majority of day learning virtually then student is reported as virtual)
- Treat the student either as a virtual or an in-person student using a threshold

#### **F4: Support Multi-District, Cross-Sector, Rural Pathway Partnerships**

- Modeled after the Rural School Innovation Zone, the Legislature should incentivize and support rural partnerships that multiply the high-quality college and career pathways available to students in each district and take advantage of the flexibilities of virtual and hybrid learning

**F5: Clarify Emergency/Stop-Gap Funding to Ensure Access to High-Quality Instruction**

- a. Currently, districts don't have an incentive to continue providing high-quality access to instruction when a student is out with an extended absence (illness, etc.) because they're getting no ADA for that kid. We want to incentivize LEAs to support students while they are not participating in in-person instruction.
  - i. Continue ADA-based model for limited emergency/stopgap virtual learning (remote conferencing)
    - Retain existing synchronous and asynchronous attendance reporting structure for remote conferencing