

Texas Commission on Virtual Education: *Policy Proposal Discussion*

Chairman Rex Gore | October 19, 2022

Framing

After deep study of the topic across our state and country, we posit that **virtual/hybrid learning can be a powerful solution to some of Texas's most significant education needs**, including: access to high quality instruction amid hiring challenges, needs for flexible learning models (e.g., work-based learning), individualized student support. Further, families and students continue to demand strong virtual/hybrid options to meet diverse needs. This commission has a charge to propose a policy framework that effectively meets those needs.

We acknowledge that pandemic era emergency-response remote instruction did not have positive outcomes for a majority of students. But we also know that pandemic era emergency-response remote instruction is not indicative of what is possible. Over 37 hours of testimony from 46 experts, district and school leaders, teachers, students, and parents have demonstrated that with **intentional planning and design**, strong virtual and hybrid school models can be established that meet student and family needs and are a haven for teachers attracted to this modality.

Finally, we understand that attracting high-quality operators of virtual/hybrid schools and ensuring broad access will mean evaluating **supply and demand factors** to balance streamlining eligibility requirements and entry processes with maintaining a high bar for performance. Our aim must be to meet continued family and student demand and establish **Texas as a national leader in innovative, high quality virtual and hybrid school models**.

Today's Meeting Format

6 Policy Areas for Discussion w/ same discussion format for each

1. Introduce a policy area
2. Share & discuss "What did we hear"
3. Share & discuss "Proposals"
4. Capture next steps & notes

***If there's alignment, or no need for further discussion, we'll move to the next policy area.*

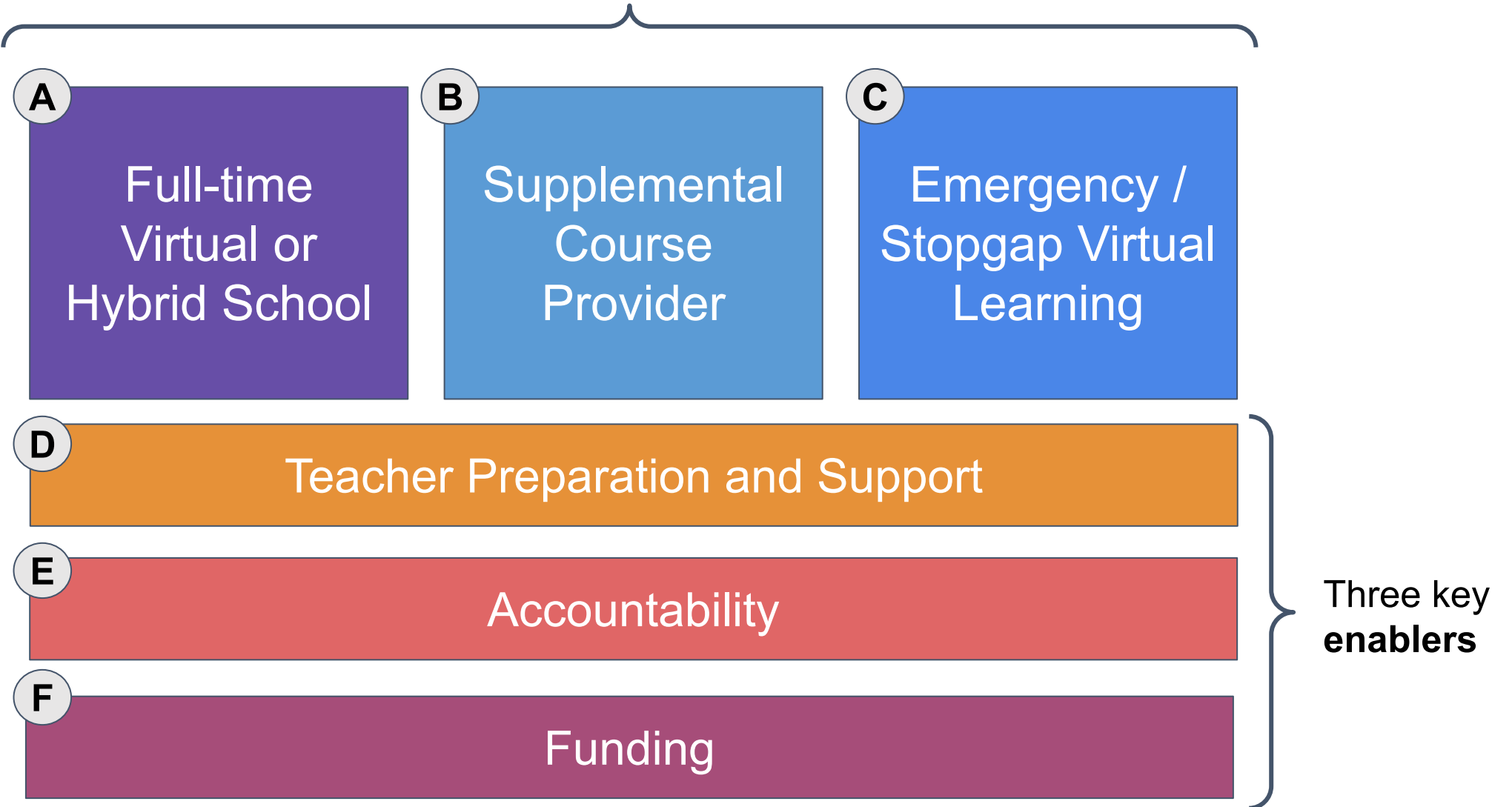
Example: Teacher Preparation & Support (30min)

20-25min - What did we hear, what is being proposed, & group discussion

5-10min - Capture agreement, next steps, lingering questions, and/or other notes

Proposals for discussion in 6 key areas

Three virtual/hybrid learning **delivery formats**



Topic A: Full Time Virtual/Hybrid Schools

What did we hear?

- Many students and families **continue to demand** full-time virtual and hybrid school options
- Pandemic emergency-response remote instruction is not indicative of the potential of virtual/hybrid learning. With **intentional design and planning**, virtual and hybrid schools can be successful (considering staffing, scheduling, curriculum, instruction, engagement, and training)
- SB 15 **eligibility requirements exclude** some students from taking advantage of virtual options
- Current statute is **complicated**, with ~7 different virtual/hybrid learning policy frameworks

Topic A: Full Time Virtual/Hybrid Schools

Proposals for discussion:

- Ensure **long-term provision** of full-time virtual and hybrid schools beyond SB 15 with **one unified policy framework**
 - Establish a **TEA approval process** for full time virtual or hybrid schools to verify that high quality planning criteria are met (e.g., school leader selected, TEKS-aligned curriculum, teachers are supported and trained)
 - Current 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
- **Conform student and LEA eligibility requirements** so they are consistent with in-person learning, enabling districts to partner with families to offer the modality that is best for each student without artificial barriers

Topic B: Supplemental Course Catalog

What did we hear?

- The TXVSN Course Catalog meets a need for **access to courses and flexibility** that many LEAs (particularly small/rural ones) have challenges providing given personnel and scale issues
 - Foreign language, math, science, AP, CTE, and other key course areas have been raised as difficult to staff areas for small/rural LEAs
- Current TXVSN course approval process **takes significant time** which is a disincentive for new providers to join and current providers to expand offerings and update courses more frequently
- Often, LEAs **lack financial or other incentives** to inform parents and students and encourage participation in the courses in the TXVSN catalog
- **Streamlined approval process and funding certainty** are essential to expand high-quality course offerings and course providers

Topic B: Supplemental Course Catalog

Proposals for discussion:

- Ensure **long-term provision** of supplemental course catalog with either: 1) Continuation and expansion of TXVSN course catalog; or 2) Phase-in of new supplemental course catalog statute as part of long-term full-time virtual/hybrid school framework
- **Simplify process** for course approval and updates, while ensuring TEKS alignment and rigor for high quality instructional design

Topic C: Emergency/Stopgap Virtual Learning

What did we hear?

- Even after the pandemic, districts will continue to need to provide **emergency or stopgap virtual learning**, in two main areas:
 - **Campus- or district-level** emergencies (e.g., natural disaster)
 - **Student-level** circumstances (e.g., extended illness or medical issue)

In such situations, districts need to be able to expediently “turn on” virtual learning for the student to ensure continuity

- Currently, districts may receive ADA to provide such emergency support via remote conferencing statute within the Student Attendance Accounting Handbook (SAAH).

Topic C: Emergency/Stopgap Virtual Learning

Proposals for discussion:

- Direct TEA to expand opportunity for emergency or stopgap virtual learning and **revise existing 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)
 - Ensuring **quality of in-person** instruction is unaffected

Topic D: Teacher Preparation and Support

What did we hear?

- Trained and well-supported **teachers are essential** to the success of high-quality virtual learning.
- It is important that educators do not simply reproduce in-person learning online. It **requires specific pedagogy and skills** unique to teaching in an online environment.
- Teachers interested in teaching in a virtual/hybrid environment need **virtual/hybrid-specific pedagogical and technical training and ongoing support**
- There is **long-term value to Texas** to build a teaching workforce with a significant number that are highly skilled in virtual/hybrid delivery
- There is an **existing requirement in statute for EPPs** to offer training for teacher candidates specific to the virtual environment

Topic D: Teacher Preparation and Support

Proposals for discussion:

- *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
- *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
- **Incentivize**, rather than require, accelerated uptake of high-quality professional development for interested teachers and districts
 - Offer a **micro-credential for teachers** to be recognized for professional expertise in this modality

Topic E: Accountability

What did we hear?

- All high-quality, exemplar virtual programs and schools had **thoughtful and significant design and planning** prior to launch
- **Strong upfront approval processes** that check for high-quality planning and fidelity of implementation will help ensure that we are not allowing the replication of pandemic-style remote instruction
- Accountability should be **strong, transparent, streamlined, and as close to in-person learning accountability** standards as possible, while upholding a high bar for ongoing performance

Topic E: Accountability

Proposals for discussion:

- 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 3, 5, and 10 year marks** based on clear, objective criteria of high quality performance
- Direct TEA to publish historic performance of virtual/hybrid providers to provide **transparency for families and students** about available options and better drive demand for high quality operators
- 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)

Topic F: Funding

What did we hear?

- Current SB 15 **ADA-based funding structures (e.g. daily check-ins and time requirements) limit schedule and model flexibilities** that families, students, teachers, and districts would like, artificially restricting the potential for virtual/hybrid models
- Current TXVSN completion-based funding **is not fully compensating providers** for instruction delivered, including high-achieving and high-growth students
- Strong models across the country provide **startup funding** to support and incentivize districts in building new, innovative programs that serve all families
- The funding system should be **simple**. It should not discourage districts from innovating and should empower districts to **find the modality that works best for each student** without financial penalties.

Topic F: Funding

Proposals for discussion:

Full-Time Virtual & Hybrid Programs

- Establish a **fiscally-neutral, enrollment-based*** funding system to better enable the flexibility needed for approved full-time virtual and hybrid programs.
- **Modify existing reporting structure** to capture enrollment* 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.
- 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 **TEA with additional FTE funding** to adequately support new and existing virtual programs and related administrative needs

*Enrollment means enrolled and eligible to earn funding

Topic F: Funding Estimates

Estimating previously ineligible virtual students that were locally funded (SB 15 Ineligible*)

- 9,977 students were enrolled in a virtual program but were not eligible for funding based on the 2021-2022 Fall PEIMS snapshot
- Based on estimated ADA of 9,217
- Assuming cost per student of \$8,321
- Estimated FSP cost of \$76.7 million**

*SB 15 Ineligible students represents students who were enrolled in a virtual program but not in membership. These students attended a virtual program but were not eligible for FSP funding.

**Cost does Not include new students to the system

Topic F: Funding

Proposals for discussion:

Supplemental

- **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
- Incentivize the Supplemental Course Catalog by providing LEAs **cost reimbursements** for enrolling students in supplemental courses subject to statewide and/or district cap that prioritizes rural and small LEAs

Emergency/Stopgap

- Continue **ADA-based model for limited emergency/stopgap** virtual learning (remote conferencing)
 - Retain existing synchronous and asynchronous attendance reporting structure for remote conferencing

Next Steps

- **Draft TCVE Report**
 - Next version for discussion November 30, 2022
 - Due December 31, 2022

We will review and iterate on report in the upcoming Commission meetings.

Upcoming TCVE Meetings

- 1. November 30, 2022*
- 2. December 14, 2022*

Contact the Texas Commission on Virtual Education

Email us at

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