Virtual Academy Handbook 2023-24

(Revised 8-9-23)

This student handbook addendum contains information specific to online learning. As an addendum, this supplement to the [WSISD Student Code of Conduct](), [Student Handbook](), and [WSISD Technology Use Handbook]() should be used in conjunction to develop an understanding of expectations for students attending the Virtual Academy of North Texas. Whereas the full student code of conduct and handbook serves as a reference for understanding in detail the system's code of conduct, students' rights and responsibilities, and the disciplinary process in a face-to-face environment, this addendum to the student handbook addresses those aspects of participation as they relate to a virtual classroom environment.

Vision Statement

Developing passion to learn...discovering purpose for tomorrow.

Mission Statement

Fostering a culture of excellence and empowering our students to be innovators and leaders of tomorrow by providing premier education.

Motto

Think BIG…Bears Do!

WE BELIEVE:

- All students are our top priority.
- Every student has value and purpose.
- Our students deserve a passionate teacher in every classroom every day.
- A safe, secure and enriched environment enhances learning.

- Learning is a shared responsibility that requires active involvement by students, staff, families, and the community.
- Continuous professional growth is essential for student success.

Contact Information
Virtual Academy of North Texas
401 South Cherry Lane
Fort Worth, Texas 76108

817-935-2300

K8virtualacademy@wsisd.net

Principal: Connie Bitters
Assistant Principal: Lynette Alexander
Instructional and Technology Support: Denise Benton
Administrative Assistant: Jennifer Tyler

School Calendar
The Virtual Academy of North Texas calendar follows the WSISD Calendar.

The Academy is a great fit for:

- Families that desire a home-school atmosphere
- Families that need flexibility
- Families with special health considerations

The Virtual Academy of North Texas has been designed as a high quality, rigorous online learning program and a choice campus available to students enrolled in K-10. For more information, please visit our website at https://virtualacademy.wsisd.com/.

Characteristics of an Online Learner
- Is academically on grade level, or higher, in reading and math
- Comfortable using digital resources and programs
- Enjoys learning and is responsible, self-disciplined and motivated to learn
- Comfortable communicating and interacting with peers and teachers
- Wants to be part of a learning community
- Exhibits effective social-emotional coping strategies and mental wellness

Application Review Process

There is an application review process, document review, and admission assessment (for students without STAAR scores). All requested documents must be received before the review process can occur.

Attendance Policy

Our families have the flexibility to earn daily attendance, Monday through Friday, through primarily asynchronous (**non-live, self-paced**) instructional methods OR through a combination of asynchronous and synchronous instruction. Students will have access to recorded lessons each day. Live lessons with teachers are available Monday through Thursday and asynchronous lessons are available on Fridays.

Attendance will be documented (counted as present) if the student participates in **one, or more** of the following:
• daily progress in Canvas, the learning management system (LMS) that confirms students accessed instruction by 11:59 pm each day,
• daily check in via teacher-student lessons and/or interactions that confirms students accessed instruction, **and/or**
• completion/turn-in of assignments from student to teacher (potentially via email or online) by 11:59 pm each day.

We do request that students attend all live sessions the first two weeks to learn about our expectations, build a relationship with the teacher and learn all systems and programs that are utilized for virtual instruction.

For online testing purposes, students will have to attend live sessions when tests are proctored.

Synchronous (live) lessons will be recorded and posted in Canvas for students to refer to, as needed.

Students that are failing any subject(s) or not on grade-level with assessments will be required to attend all synchronous (live) sessions to remain enrolled.

When students attend synchronous (live) sessions, they will be required to be in appropriate dress, WITH CAMERA ON. Students are expected to be in an appropriate learning environment with technology equipment and learning materials prepared and readily available during all lessons when attending live lessons. (Students will not be allowed to attend class from areas that will distract from the learning environment of others, like their bed, while shopping, watching tv, listening to music, etc.) Students may utilize virtual backgrounds to protect their home privacy.

Attendance/Participation

Students with consistent school attendance and participation often have higher academic performance. In the virtual classroom, consistent attendance is even more crucial to high academic performance.

Attendance policies will continue to be in place. Online students are expected to follow our asynchronous attendance policy to stay academically successful.

Students are expected to complete their assignments by the due date. Progress monitoring of assignment completion will occur weekly. Students not completing assignments and passing may be removed from the program.

When attending live sessions, students will be expected to log onto the live sessions <u>five minutes prior</u> to the session starting. Students will not be allowed to enter once the session starts due to loss of instructional time for the other students and interruption of the lesson.

Learning Coach Expectations

Students should have a learning coach available for support as needed. Younger students will need more support.

Learning coaches should be appropriately dressed and use appropriate language. The learning coach is there to observe and support, but not answer questions or do the work for the student.

It is expected that an adult learning coach is with the student for assistance as needed, to ensure that the student attends classes and completes assignments.

Helpful tips for Learning Coaches:

- Attend one of the parent orientation events in August before the first day of instruction.
- Maintain open communication with your child's teacher and make school a priority.
- Be patient. It can take time to adjust to a virtual learning environment.
- Parents who have questions or concerns during live sessions are encouraged to contact the teacher during the teacher's office hours and refrain from interrupting synchronous instruction.
- Facilitate academic support and encouragement as a learning partner to motivate, and guide your child throughout the school year.
- Ensure your child is on track with assignments and coursework.
- Provide your child with assistance on their day to day activities with the exception of designated independent work
- Assist in supporting your child's needs by establishing and managing the daily schedule communicated by the teacher.
- Create a designated learning space for your child at home to learn comfortably.
- Maintain communication with your child's teacher by phone, email messages, and/or online meetings to create a learning partnership.

In-Home Learning Space Expectations When Attending Live Sessions

Students should have a designated learning station that is ready with their technology device and materials each day.
Expectations include:
- Students should be sitting in a chair at a desk or table.
- Students should have all learning materials like laptop, headphones, paper, pencils, journals, books, etc. readily available. Students should not leave the session to retrieve materials after class starts.
- Students should be dressed appropriately.

- Students should have cameras on and the provided virtual background should be displayed to protect the privacy of their home environment.
- Students should follow teacher instructions for use of audio, video, chat box, hand raising, mute, and other student interactions.

Teachers will inform students how to proceed with these features of the virtual classroom. Following the lead of the teacher can significantly increase the efficiency with which virtual classrooms operate and prevent disruptions to the learning.

Dress Code When Attending Live Sessions

Participating in online instruction from the comfort of one's home may lead some students to be less formal about their attire and manner of dress. Although students are not expected to dress as if they are leaving their homes to attend school, they still should dress in a way that is appropriate for the school environment.

Engagement in the Virtual Classroom

Attendance and participation are both indicators of student engagement. Students who attend and actively participate are more likely to be engaged in promoting their own academic success. Whereas attendance and participation measure the frequency of logging in, engagement is a measure of the integrity of those log-ins.

In-person Support and Assessment Requirements

We will have a mandatory parent/student orientation when a student enrolls. During this meeting, we will discuss policies, procedures, expectations, etc. Technology devices and instructional materials will be issued at this time and families will be able to meet our teachers.

To remain enrolled, students **will** be required to report for state assessments and, possibly, interventions at various times during the year. This **will** include, but is not limited to:

- STAAR/TELPAS Assessments
- Students that are not academically successful may be required to come in for intervention/tutoring services

OPTIONAL activities for students include family engagement programs, clubs, special academic activities, field trips, etc.

For online testing purposes, students will have to attend live sessions when tests are proctored.

Instructional Information

Students will be instructed in English/language arts, math, social studies, science, fine arts, physical education, technology, etc. All teachers are certified. District grading guidelines will be in place.

Students who are enrolled in the Virtual Academy of North Texas are assigned a schedule of classes with courses designated for specific times and days of the week. On any given day, students may be working independently on follow-up or practice assignments, or they may have the option of receiving "live," synchronous instruction depending on the schedule for the specific grade level.

6th through 10th grade students who desire to participate in UIL activities will be able to participate at the designated school campus (based on their proof of residency) as their schedule allows.

For students in grades 6-10, learners will follow a full schedule – that is, they will carry the typical number of courses (seven for most students) on their schedule. 8th-10th graders will be contacted before the year begins regarding elective choice and PE/athletic choice.

All students enrolled will have access to the high quality curriculum aligned with the state standards (TEKS) and developed by our district instructional department and teachers. Lesson quality, the amount of work assigned, the timing and pacing, and the order in which concepts are learned will follow our district scope and sequence. We will provide in-person tutoring as needed and as teacher schedule allows.

Although student attendance will be taken by the asynchronous method, students are encouraged to attend the live, synchronous sessions.

Synchronous instruction refers to instruction that occurs in real-time, where the teacher and the students are present at the same time and can interact with each other. Synchronous instruction is as close to traditional in-school instruction as possible in a remote learning experience.

These live, synchronous sessions will be recorded and posted on Canvas for students to access and review at a later time.

Asynchronous instruction refers to instruction that is undertaken independently as students log in at different times and work individually to complete assignments that have been posted by the teacher. During asynchronous instruction, there are no real-time interactions possible between the teacher and students.

For asynchronous learning, students will engage in pre-planned and assigned learning activities, such as:

- Completing an individual assignment
- Working with classmates on a group assignment
- Viewing a previously recorded lesson or watching an instructional video
- Taking a test or a quiz

Students' success with synchronous and asynchronous instruction in the virtual classroom is dependent upon the student's appropriate use of the technology available. WSISD has provided guidelines for students to follow when using hardware and software.

Grading Guidelines

We will follow WSISD Grading Guidelines. Grades are a measure of achievement at a specific point in a student's development. This measure provides feedback to the student towards mastery of the state standards (TEKS). Not all assessments are nor should be used as summative grades. The most effective form of assessment is one that is diagnostic and provides student's feedback that leads to deeper understanding and mastery of the tested standard.

All grading practices used by teachers should be communicated in writing and shared with students and parents prior to the school year. All grading practices must fall within the parameters established in the grading guidelines and district policy which can be found on the district website.

Academic Dishonesty

Academic dishonesty includes cheating or copying the work of another student, plagiarism and unauthorized communication between students during an assignment. The determination that a student has engaged in academic dishonesty shall be based on the judgment of the classroom teacher or other supervising employee including the consideration of written materials, observation or information from students. Students found to have engaged in academic dishonesty shall be subject to disciplinary penalties and be required to take an alternate assignment or assessment. Such action will be determined by the campus academic dishonesty policy.

Progress Reporting

Families will receive an email with their student's course progress each week via SKYWARD.

Communication with Teachers

Virtual teachers will communicate regularly with their students through a variety of means including School Status, CANVAS, email, Google Meet, and phone calls to both student and parent/guardian. Each virtual teacher will have set 'office hours' per day (posted times) in which a student or parent may call with questions or concerns. Teachers should respond within 24 hours.

Virtual teachers are expected to provide feedback on assignments to students in a timely manner and contact parents with any concerns they may have regarding student's progress and/or grade.

The best way to communicate with your teacher is through School Status. For the most timely response, please contact teachers during their designated office hours and allow 24 hours for a response. Please be mindful of the teacher's personal time (after school hours) when texting or calling.Teachers will respond to communication during their office hours and conference period.

Technology

We require all students to utilize a district issued device in order to provide a safe and secure learning environment, rapid technical assistance, compatibility alignment, educational monitoring software to support the online testing environment, and to ensure our students are in an optimal educational environment.

A MiFi/Personal Hotspot for portable internet access is also available upon request.

The full Technology Use plan can be viewed here. All students will be issued a district device and charger that must be used for all schoolwork. Students must abide by the Acceptable Use of Technology Policy (AUP). A $25 technology assurance fee must be paid prior to receiving a laptop. Students will be charged a fee for lost or damaged technology equipment.

Families will receive technology tutorials during the parent/student orientation.

Canvas, SeeSaw, and Google Meet will be used daily in addition to other academic programs. Classes will be synchronous and asynchronous depending upon the schedule.

Students will need access to reliable internet service.

Technology issues should be entered on the Technology Help-Desk here.

Technology Etiquette

When students are participating in Google Meet or any other face-to-face virtual platforms:

- Students will be required to use the camera feature so that the teacher can visibly see the student. A virtual background will be provided for each student to use.
- Students will be asked to keep their microphones on mute unless they have a question or are responding to the teacher or classmate. (This is for group sessions only).
- Students should use appropriate and polite language.
- Students should attempt to keep all background noise and distractions to a minimum.
- Students should follow teacher instructions for use of audio, video, chat box, hand raising, mute, and other student interactions.

Special Populations Support

Students with disabilities served through the WSISD Special Education Department will have equal access to the Virtual Academy through the open enrollment criteria. The district ensures to the greatest extent possible that each student with an IEP or IAP will receive instructional services to meet the unique needs of the student as documented in their IEP or IAP.

Students who have been identified as gifted, will be served through one of our Gifted and Talented teachers virtually.

Extracurricular Activities

Students may participate in extracurricular activities while enrolled as their schedule permits. UIL eligibility rules apply.

Safe Learning Environment

We are committed to ensuring that every student learns in an environment that is safe and secure and conducive to receiving a quality education. That safe and secure environment extends to students who are learning in virtual classrooms. Administrators and teachers understand the importance of providing safe, predictable, and positive virtual classrooms for students. Some practices used in the physical classroom can be adapted to virtual classroom experience. In the virtual classroom environment, however, communicating with teachers is essential to a positive online experience. Students and learning coaches should communicate regularly with their teachers about their academic performance and any situations that may hinder their academic progress. Teachers play an integral role in establishing and maintaining safe and supportive learning environments.

Scope of Authority

The behavior code outlined in this addendum applies to all students enrolled in the Virtual Academy of North Texas. Additionally, the code of conduct applies in all situations in which students are involved.

Therefore, a student may be subject to disciplinary responses when he or she commits an act or acts while at home when such acts can be shown to pose a threat or danger to the safety of other students, staff or school property; and/or the act or acts prevents the orderly delivery of the online

instructional program.

The aim of this student handbook addendum is to provide students with information that will help to prevent violations of the school system's code of conduct while participating in the virtual school environment.

Change of Learning Environment

The Virtual Academy of North Texas reserves the right to revoke a student's enrollment in the program the if student(s) is not making academic progress, has excessive absences and/or lack of engagement.

Student enrollment may be revoked for any of the following reasons:

- Is academically unsuccessful with grades and/or not on grade-level with assessments;
- Fails to attend live sessions (if required due to failing grades or not on grade-level with assessments;) and participate;
- Does not adhere to guidelines regarding asynchronous attendance plan, behavior, assignment completion, etc.;
- Has excessive unexcused asynchronous absences; or
- Administration recommends withdrawal.

Student and parent conferencing to develop an intervention plan will occur before revocation occurs.

Healthy Routines During Virtual Learning

During virtual learning, students should pay attention to habits that support their physical and emotional health. Students and their families are encouraged to:

- Remain active. Daily physical activity improves the health of the heart. It also helps students deal with stress. Taking a 30-minute walk each day improves physical and emotional wellbeing. When sitting at the computer, students should take breaks between sessions – standing up, stretching. This will help avoid muscle fatigue and stiffness.
- Talk with friends and family. Students need to grow their relationship skills, too. This requires learning how to express themselves and how to listen. Students should have conversations (not only texts) each day, with family or friends.
- Get outdoors daily, if possible. Outside play for 20 minutes each day will protect vision. Too much close-up work can cause nearsightedness.
- Protect the ears. When using headphones, students should be sure that the volume is as low as possible. If sounds can be heard by people standing nearby, the volume is too loud. Students should limit the noise in the room where learning is taking place so that an increased volume is not necessary.
- Get enough sleep. Sleep is essential for students' physical health. Sleep benefits the immune system and mood. A lack of sleep can make an individual irritable, cause anxiety, and worsen feelings of depression. Healthy sleep habits include:
  - Having a set time each night to go to bed.
  - Allowing time to relax before bed.
  - Stretching or meditating and allowing the mind and body to begin to slow down.
  - Turning off the lights.
  - Turning off electronic devices.
  - Getting up at the same time each morning.
  - Allowing enough time for sleep.

- ○ Children between ages 6 and 12 need 9-12 hours of sleep.
- ○ Teenagers between 13 and 18 need 8-10 hours of sleep.

TXVSN- Texas Virtual School Network

We are now a part of the TXVSN Network. Students have the option to enroll in electronic courses offered through the Texas Virtual School Network (TXVSN) in specific situations where required courses are otherwise unavailable or do not fit in the schedule. All courses offered through the TXVSN are aligned to TEKS and have rigorous standards.

Sample Daily Schedules and School Supplies

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

Sample schedule reflects Monday through Thursday. Friday will be reserved for asynchronous lessons, tutoring, interventions and assessments as needed.

School supply lists can be found on the website.

School Supply List Link

Kindergarten

Lessons are recorded and posted for students choosing the asynchronous learning option.

	Kindergarten Student Sample Schedule
	Areas highlighted in light blue will be daily whole group live instruction.
	The areas highlighted in gray could be either daily live, independent work, one on one conferring, or small group work during a portion of this time. This will be dependent on the individual student and class needs. The schedule will be shared ahead of time.
8:00- 8:15	**Morning Meeting**
8:15- 9:05	**Language Arts- Word Study** **Small Groups and Conferences and/or Independent Language Arts Work**
9:05-9:55	**Special Areas (P.E. or Fine Arts)**
9:55-11:30	**Language Arts- Reading/Writing (Groups will rotate live)** **Small Groups and Conferences and/or Independent Language Arts Work**
11:30-12:00	**Intervention- Reading**
12:00-12:30	**Lunch**
12:30-1:00	**Small Groups and Conferences and/or Science/Social Studies Work**
1:00-2:30	**Math (Groups will rotate live)** **Small Groups and Conferences and/or Independent Math Work**
2:30-3:00	**Intervention- Math**
3:00-3:30	**Office Hours**

1st Grade

Lessons are recorded and posted for students choosing the asynchronous learning option.

1st Grade Student Sample Schedule	
Areas highlighted in light blue will be daily whole group live instruction.	
The areas highlighted in gray could be either daily live, independent work, one on one conferring, or small group work during a portion of this time. This will be dependent on the individual student and class needs. The schedule will be shared ahead of time.	
8:00- 8:15	**Morning Meeting**
8:15- 9:15	**Math (Groups will rotate live)** **Small Groups and Conferences and/or Independent Math Work**
9:15- 9:45	**Intervention- Math**
9:50-10:35	**Special Areas (P.E. or Fine Arts)**
10:35-11:05	**Language Arts- Word Study**
11:05 -11:35	**Small Groups and Conferences and/or Independent Language Arts Work**
11:35 -12:05	**Small Groups and Conferences and/or Science/Social Studies Work**
12:05-12:35	**Lunch**
12:35- 2:30	**Language Arts- Reading/Writing (Groups will rotate live)** **Small Groups and Conferences and/or Independent Language Arts Work**
2:30- 3:00	**Intervention- Reading**
3:00-3:30	**Office Hours**

2nd Grade

Lessons are recorded and posted for students choosing the asynchronous learning option.

	2nd Grade Student Sample Schedule
	Areas highlighted in light blue will be daily whole group live instruction.
	The areas highlighted in gray could be either daily live, independent work, one on one conferring, or small group work during a portion of this time. This will be dependent on the individual student and class needs. The schedule will be shared ahead of time.
8:00- 8:15	**Morning Meeting**
8:15- 9:45	**Language Arts- Reading/Writing (Groups will rotate live)** **Small Groups and Conferences and/or Independent Language Arts Work**
9:45- 10:35	**Small Groups and Conferences and/or Independent Science/Social Studies Work**
10:35-11:20	**Special Areas (P.E. or Fine Arts)**
11:20-12:00	**Small Groups and Conferences and/or Independent Language Arts Work-**
12:00- 12:30	**Lunch**
12:30 -2:00	**Math (Groups will rotate live)** **Small Groups and Conferences and/or Independent Math Work**
2:00- 2:30	**Intervention- Reading**
2:30-3:00	**Intervention- Math**
3:00-3:30	**Office Hours**

3rd Grade

Lessons are recorded and posted for students choosing the asynchronous learning option.

3rd Grade Student Sample Schedule	
Areas highlighted in light blue will be daily whole group live instruction.	
The areas highlighted in gray could be either daily live, independent work, one on one conferring, or small group work during a portion of this time. This will be dependent on the individual student and class needs. The schedule will be shared ahead of time.	
8:00- 8:15	**Morning Meeting**
8:15- 10:15	**Language Arts- Reading/Writing (Groups will rotate live)** **Small Groups and Conferences and/or Independent Language Arts Work**
10:15-10:45	**Intervention- Reading**
10:45-12:00	**Math (Groups will rotate live)** **Small Groups and Conferences and/or Independent Math Work**
12:00- 12:30	**Lunch**
12:30- 1:00	**Intervention- Math**
1:00- 1:45	**Special Areas (P.E. or Fine Arts)**
1:45-2:30	**Language Arts- Grammar**
2:30- 3:00	**Small Groups and Conferences and/or Independent Science/Social Studies Work**
3:00-3:30	**Office Hours**

4th Grade

Lessons are recorded and posted for students choosing the asynchronous learning option.

4th Grade Student Sample Schedule	
Areas highlighted in light blue will be daily whole group live instruction.	
The areas highlighted in gray could be either daily live, independent work, one on one conferring, or small group work during a portion of this time. This will be dependent on the individual student and class needs. The schedule will be shared ahead of time.	
8:00- 8:15	**Morning Meeting**
8:15- 9:45	**Language Arts- Reading/Writing(Groups will rotate live)** **Small Groups and Conferences and/or Independent Language Arts Work**
9:45-10:30	**Language Arts- Grammar**
10:30-12:00	**Math (Groups will rotate live)** **Small Groups and Conferences and/or Independent Math Work**
12:00 -12:30	**Lunch**
12:30-1:05	**Intervention- Math**
1:05-1:40	**Intervention- Reading**
1:45-2:30	**Special Areas (P.E. or Fine Arts)**
2:30-3:00	**Small Groups and Conferences and/or Independent Science/Social Studies Work**
3:00- 3:30	**Office Hours**

5th-10th Grade

Lessons are recorded and posted for students choosing the asynchronous learning option.

	5th-10th Grade Student Sample Block Schedule	
	5th-10th Grade Students will be on an alternating block schedule. **There will be daily, face to face, instruction that is required for attendance.** *Final student schedules will be created by the classroom teachers.* **Throughout the day, students will have a variety of instructional settings. This will include live, synchronous learning with the teacher, as well as independent, asynchronous learning time on their own. Small group and individual tutoring, conferencing and intervention times will also be scheduled, as needed.** **Fridays will have individualized remediation sessions scheduled and possible asynchronous lessons.** **Electives will vary by grade level.**	
	Monday/Wednesday	**Tuesday/Thursday**
8:00-8:45	**Fine Arts**	**PE**
8:50-9:05	**Morning Meeting**	**Morning Meeting**
9:10-9:20	**Break**	**Break**
9:25-10:40	**English/Language Arts**	**Math**
10:45-11:45	**ELAR/Math Support**	**ELAR/Math Support**
11:45-12:15	**Lunch**	**Lunch**
12:15-1:00	**Social Studies**	**Science**
1:05-1:50	**Career Investigations/Other Elective**	**Technology/Other Elective**
1:55-3:30	**Student Support/Intervention**	**Student Support/Intervention**