

Developing a Student Orientation Course for Internet- or Computer-Based Community Schools

STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS

[Ohio Revised Code 3314.271 Orientation Course for Online Community Schools](#)

(A) Each internet- or computer-based community school shall offer a student-orientation course and shall notify each student who enrolls in that school of that student's opportunity to participate in the student-orientation course.

(B) The department of education and workforce shall provide guidance to internet- or computer-based community schools for developing and delivering the orientation course.

(C) Each internet- or computer-based community school may, at the time of a particular student's enrollment in that school, ask the student's parent or guardian to estimate the length of time the student will attend the school. Any information collected pursuant to this division shall be included in an aggregated format in the school's annual report required by division (A)(II)(g) of section 3314.03 of the Revised Code.

(D) Each internet- or computer-based community school, on a periodic basis throughout each school year, shall communicate with each student's parent, guardian or custodian regarding the performance and progress of that student. Each internet- or computer-based community school also shall provide opportunities for parent teacher conferences, shall document the school's requests for such conferences, and may permit students to participate in the conferences. Parent-teacher conferences may be conducted through electronic means.

ORIENTATION PROGRAM

A comprehensive orientation program for students enrolling in an online community school should address the following:

Individuals with Disabilities

Each internet- or computer-based community school must comply with the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), as well as the Ohio Operating Standards for the Education of Children with Disabilities. Requirements include responsibility for Child Find policies and procedures to identify, locate and evaluate students who may require special education and related services, as well as responsibility for ensuring that a Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) is provided to all students with disabilities in accordance with state and federal requirements.

On Aug. 5, 2016, the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services issued a [Dear Colleague letter](#) regarding the provision of a Free Appropriate Public Education to children with disabilities attending public virtual schools. This letter of significant guidance clarifies several of the critical requirements in Part B of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act that apply to virtual schools.

Technology and Materials

Training students and their adult support system, which includes parents or guardians, on how to effectively use and access school materials in an online learning model is key to student success.

- Explain what materials (whether technology-based or not) the school will use during a student's enrollment.
- Provide access to the individualized education programs (IEPs) for students with disabilities to ensure that teachers and other providers understand the specific responsibilities for each individual student on an IEP.
- Describe and demonstrate the processes, including attendance, completion and monitoring the school will do and assess. Examples may include:
 - An introductory lesson that provides experiences in all the areas of the online learning environment;
 - An introduction call between the teacher/mentor and student and/or parent; or
 - A guided tour through the learning site and education model, using delivery options such as:
 - How-to videos
 - Video conferencing
 - One-to-one chats

Planning, Routines and Roles for New Students

Learning in a computer-based environment can be a major adjustment for students and their parents and guardians. It is important that school officials help the family and students develop strategies for the student's success.

- Introduce the designated support person (mentor) to the student and family and provide contact information and availability.
- Explain and provide all daily and regular routines to the student in writing (student handbook or guidebook, including a parent handbook) or spoken in the native language or other mode of communication the student uses.
- Include in onboarding a description of the experience of learning online and what a student needs to manage challenges successfully, such as the time management and time commitment necessary. Examples may include:
 - Guidance in helping students set up a personal workspace that is conducive to learning; or
 - Developing a family learning plan that will help the student receive other support and resources for his or her learning beyond what the online school provides.

- Describe the implication of school processes, including attendance, completion, and monitoring and how the school will assess them. Examples may include:
 - A mentor webpage on the site that includes documents and plans, as well as contact information;
 - A document that spells out the roles and responsibilities of the student, parent, mentor and teacher for the student and parent. A review of the document should be included in a discussion during orientation;

The development of a student plan during orientation that includes a learning schedule and/or expectations for completion. This also may include how and where to find support. Additionally, the orientation will familiarize students with all learning opportunities (both online and offline) and how the school will document these opportunities.

- Assist students identified as at-risk of dropping out in finding wraparound non-school services to address issues that are barriers to their success in school. Contact these students more and follow up to make sure they are adjusting to the online learning environment.

Effective Communication Throughout the Year

Parent involvement and regular communication with teachers will benefit students. They raise students' academic achievement, increase motivation for learning and help develop more positive attitudes toward coursework and school in general. Schools should send parents, custodians, or guardians frequent, ongoing feedback about how their students are performing and progressing in courses.

- Teachers should initiate regular contact with parents, custodians, or guardians. They should use email, telephone calls and face-to-face communication when possible to establish clear expectations.
- Administrators should initiate contact soon after they identify a problem so they can find a timely solution. Waiting too long can create additional problems.

For example, you will want to quickly address a dip in student activity or productivity with a parent or guardian. Then, take steps to get the student back on track.

- Follow-through is critical. Parents and teachers want to see that the others will do what they say they will do.
- Parents and teachers should have the information they need to help students. Parent communications should be in a form and language that makes sense to them.
- Teachers share good news frequently!
- When communicating with parents, provide feedback about online classroom learning activities, student accomplishments and how parents and guardians can help with their children's learning.
- Conduct parent-teacher conferences with the right attitude.

The goal of both the teacher and parent should be the success of the student. Do not shy away from discussing difficult and uncomfortable issues.

- If the student does not participate in the parent-teacher conference, encourage the parents or guardian to update him or her. Give parents positive things to share with their children so the discussion does not only focus on any concerns discussed with the teacher.
- Follow up is important. Touch base with parents periodically to ensure that plans to support students are in place. Plans to support students may also include getting organized or seeking extra help.