Texas Commission on Virtual Education
Final Report

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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 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, and 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 Keven Ellis. It was chaired by Rex Gore, member of the State Board for 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 eleven meetings over the course of the year. All totaled, members heard 37 hours of testimony, learning from over 46 individuals representing local educational agency (LEA) staff, including superintendents, teachers, and school leaders; state-level leaders; 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, regular session) created the 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 governor and the legislature.

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

Summary of Combined Policy Recommendations
It is important to understand the policy recommendations made by the Commission in the context of the testimony and major findings, which are offered in the summary that follows. However, the table below shows all of the specific policy recommendations made throughout this document.

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

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

- Modify Texas Education Code Chapter 30A with one clear framework for virtual, hybrid, and supplemental programs to replace current fragmented rules and statutes
- Establish a TEA approval process for new full-time virtual or hybrid schools and programs that includes a required planning year to verify that high-quality design criteria are met
    a. Recommended criteria includes, but is not limited to:
        i. Academic plan with evidence of TEKS-aligned curriculum and instructional practices, evidence of progress monitoring and interventions, plan for meeting the needs of and adhering to related state and federal law for special populations and at-risk students
        ii. Operational plan which includes staffing model, selected school leader, learning objectives for required professional development and job-embedded coaching, student and family engagement, school calendar and schedules, enrollment plans, cyber security and student data privacy measures
- Create a separate approval process for current Texas programs and providers to receive a fast track approval and a "grace period year" to operate while moving toward formal approval in the new system, while verifying that high-quality design criteria are met
    a. Recommended criteria includes, but is not limited to:
        i. Outcomes data, including student outcomes and operational performance data
        ii. Academic plan with evidence of TEKS-aligned curriculum and

instructional practices, evidence of progress monitoring and interventions, plan for meeting the needs of and adhering to related state and federal law for special populations and at-risk students

iii. Operational plan which includes staffing model, selected school leader, learning objectives for required professional development and job-embedded coaching, student and family engagement, school calendar and schedules, enrollment plans, cyber security and student data privacy measures

- Ensure special populations (e.g. students with disabilities including Dyslexia, students who are identified emergent bilingual, English learners, gifted and talented, highly-mobile and/or identified as 'at-risk') have access to all state and federally-required rights
- Consider aligning requirements for approval processes to national standards for high-quality virtual learning programs (e.g. National Standards for Quality Online Learning, Quality Matters, Online Learning Consortium)

A2: Ensure Student and Local Education Agency Eligibility Requirements are Consistent Across Models

- 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.)

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

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

- Ensure long-term provision of supplemental course catalog by phase-in of new supplemental course catalog statute as part of the new policy framework
- Simplify process for course approval and course updates that allows the certification and regular recertification of a program or provider, while verifying that high-quality design criteria are met
    - Recommended criteria includes, but is not limited to:
        - Outcomes data including student outcomes and operational performance data
        - Academic plan with evidence of TEKS-aligned curriculum and instructional practices, evidence of progress monitoring and interventions, plan for meeting the needs of and adhering to related state and federal law for special populations and at-risk students
        - Operational plan which includes staffing model, learning objectives for required professional development and job-embedded coaching, cyber security and student data privacy measures
- Create a separate approval process for current Texas supplemental programs and providers (e.g. TXVSN Course Catalog providers) to receive a fast track approval and a “grace period year” to operate while moving toward formal approval in the new system,

while verifying that high-quality design criteria are met
    - Recommended criteria includes, but is not limited to:
        - Outcomes data including student outcomes and operational performance data
        - Academic plan with evidence of TEKS-aligned curriculum and instructional practices, evidence of progress monitoring and interventions, plan for meeting the needs of and adhering to related state and federal law for special populations and at-risk students
        - Operational plan which includes staffing model, learning objectives for required professional development and job-embedded coaching, cyber security and student data privacy measures
- Ensure special populations (e.g. students with disabilities including Dyslexia, students who are identified emergent bilingual, English learners, gifted and talented, highly-mobile and/or identified as 'at-risk') have access to all state and federally-required rights
- Consider aligning requirements for approval processes to national standards for high-quality virtual learning programs (e.g. National Standards for Quality Online Learning, Quality Matters, Online Learning Consortium)

B2: Require LEAs To Create Mechanisms for Informing Students and Families of Opportunities

- Ensure an LEA parent notification requirement, similar to existing statute (TEC 30A.007 a-1), is included in the new policy framework and enforced
    - Include how to access supplemental course catalog offerings, process for enrollment, and relevant definitions
    - Share data security measures in virtual school report card

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

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
    - Allow LEAs to partner with Education Service Centers, other LEAs, and approved virtual, hybrid, and supplemental entities to implement emergency learning plans

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

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

- For teachers in our workforce already, direct TEA in partnerships with ESCs and LEAs to provide professional development offerings for existing teachers aligned with research-based best practices in high-quality virtual/hybrid learning, engaging with key stakeholders and subject-matter experts
- Teachers who choose to teach in a virtual program must complete professional development aligned to research-based best practices for virtual learning
    - For teachers currently teaching in a virtual, hybrid, or supplemental program, LEAs may determine that previous experience teaching in a virtual program or prior professional development related to virtual learning pedagogy fulfills this expectation

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

- For teachers in the pipeline, require the State Board for Educator Certification (SBEC), with stakeholder engagement, to define and provide a framework for hybrid/virtual learning training that can be embedded into educator preparation programs (EPPs), including virtual pedagogy and using virtual 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
- Direct TEA and SBEC to engage stakeholders during the creation of and planning for the micro-credential program
- Incentivize, rather than require, accelerated uptake of high-quality professional development for interested teachers and districts, in the form of paying for the micro-credential and a stipend for the time to earn it

D4: Providing Guardrails To Deliver Virtual Learning with Excellence

- Teachers should not be required to teach virtually outside of stopgap/emergency scenarios
- Teachers should not teach concurrently

D5: Provide Professional Development for Emergency or Stopgap Virtual Education

- In the case of emergency/stopgap situations, direct TEA in partnership with ESCs to provide professional development offerings if the local LEA cannot provide it

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

E1: Creation of Strong Approval & Recertification Process for Programs With An Emphasis on Planning and Design

- Creation of a strong approval process for full-time virtual, hybrid, and supplemental programs as stated above in recommendations A1 and B1 of this report

    - After approval, require TEA to recertify programs at Year 3 and every subsequent 5-year marks (e.g Year 3, Year 8, Year 13) based on outcomes data including student outcomes and operational performance

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

- Virtual and hybrid programs should have an accountability system that is as close to the in-person accountability system as possible (e.g. Standard A-F accountability and Alternative Education Accountability)
- For full-time virtual and hybrid programs, TEA should assign the program separate accountability ratings as if the program were a campus of the LEA
    - If the LEA partners with an outside provider, the provider will also receive the same accountability rating as the program
    - Direct TEA to require LEAs to include data sharing agreement in the virtual program report card

E3: Publish Historic Performance of Virtual and Hybrid Providers

- Direct TEA to publish on their website the historic performance of full-time, hybrid, and supplemental programs and providers to provide transparency for families and students about available options
    - Include relevant definitions (e.g. synchronous, asynchronous) and information about program characteristics, program type (e.g. hybrid, virtual, dropout recovery program), and student demographic information
- Direct TEA to include virtual program outcomes in the overall LEA report card, but clearly reported separately

E4: Monitor Implementation of Virtual Programs and Student Outcomes Related to Policy Changes

- Request that the Legislature include a future interim charge to monitor the implementation of new virtual education policy framework and related outcomes

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

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 TEA with additional FTE funding to adequately support new and existing virtual programs and related administrative needs

F3: Establish Supplemental Course Threshold for Reporting Students as Virtual Students
- Establish a threshold that treats students as either a virtual or an in-person student using a 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)

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/Stopgap Funding to Ensure Access to High-Quality Instruction
- Continue ADA-based model for limited emergency/stopgap virtual learning (remote conferencing)
- Retain existing synchronous and asynchronous attendance reporting structure for remote conferencing

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 Common School District Virtual School

After a deep study of the topic and 37 hours of testimony from 46 content experts, district and school leaders, teachers, students, and parents across our State and country, we contend that virtual learning can be a powerful solution for some of Texas's most significant educational needs. Offered through a variety of delivery models, judiciously implemented, with intentional planning and design, and strong accountability, virtual education can be a critical tool for:
- Responding effectively to family and student demand for approaches that fit 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. work-based learning, early-college credit, and independent study) in support of individual and collective education 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

"My goal in all the time I've been working within education has been to make sure that every student in Texas has the opportunity for a great education. [...] We need to have the ability and the flexibility to meet students where they are because we can have brilliant kids who don't educate well in a traditional classroom. Our society could certainly use that brilliance."
-Representative Matt Shaheen, Commission Member

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, 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 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 LEAs (public school districts and public charter schools), education service centers (ESCs), and higher education institutions to build additional programs. The state should also look to attract national high-quality providers of virtual programs, hybrid programs, and supplemental courses to partner with LEAs. 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.

As Senator and Commission member Royce West noted in proceedings, "*the time for virtual education has come. It's going to be part of our toolbox in order to make certain that we provide a quality education.*" Moving forward toward a more innovative and equitable vision will require an integrated set of policies with 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 not 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 careers. 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 enrollment caps, targets, or preconditions.

"It's been really disheartening for my child and me 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 the 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 where 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 (e.g. students with disabilities including Dyslexia, students who are identified emergent bilingual, English learners, gifted and talented, highly-mobile and/or identified as 'at-risk'). 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 off 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."*

Local education agencies who provide virtual education can and must be held accountable for designing for universal access as well as developing enrollment policies that ensure students with learning disabilities or special needs are able to attend virtual and hybrid schools; there should not be policies that prevent or make it difficult for students with disabilities to enroll in any virtual learning environment. Additionally, schools must offer the same level of services and supports for special populations, including addressing the needs of special populations as required by federal and state laws (e.g. IDEA, ADA, Section 504, Bilingual Education Act).

"It's the educational leaders like you all and the institutions that ultimately will be held to these Office of Civil Rights (OCR) standards. That's to me why it's really important to help teachers and educational leaders understand [the laws and] what accessibility is and what it looks like when they see it." - Dr. Mary Rice, University of New Mexico

"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 education coordinator not only provides services for those students with IEPs, [but] they also meet every other week with parents to talk to them about their student's 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

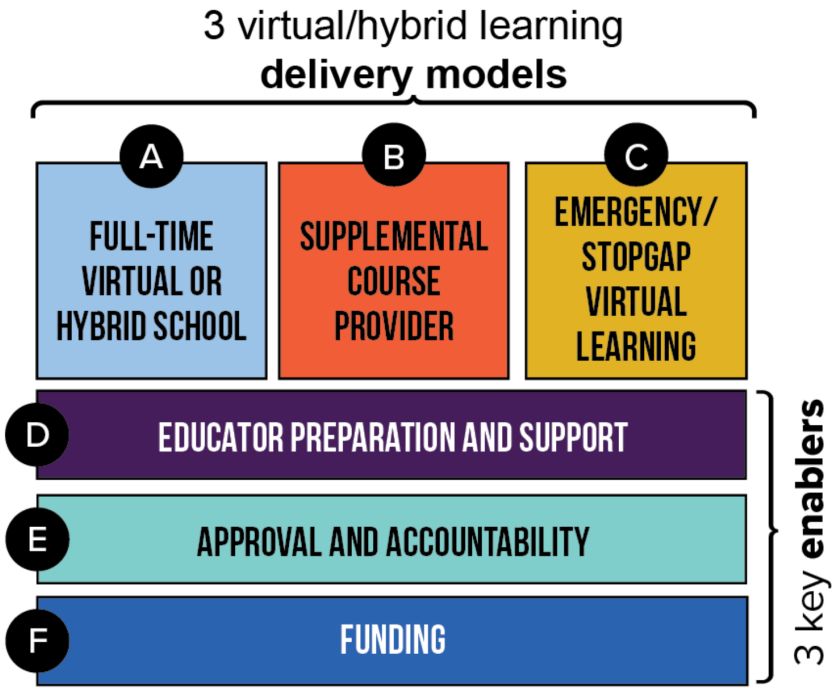
- **Simple and Consistent.** In order for district leaders and families to easily understand and embrace these innovative options for education, the policies need to be as simple as possible, and as consistent with in-person models as possible, while maintaining some flexibility for virtual learning's 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 exemplary practitioners. Instruction, undertaken by expert educators, must reflect careful planning aligned to research-based practices for online learning as well as the Texas Essential 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 following diagram provides an overview of lettered report subsections that provide more detailed definitions, findings, and descriptions of recommendations within each area.



The sections that follow detail major findings and specific, detailed recommendations to meet objectives aligned to the framework.

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 areas. 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 the 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, Commission Member*

"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?

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. These programs can 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**- 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.

- Before the 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 with 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 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 eligibility 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 the support students experience as well as a 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 an 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, Senior Vice President of Policy and Advocacy, 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 by freeing up physical space through hybrid programming.

"We wanted to begin to offer as many programming 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 inter-district 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 create new programs.

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

***"**When we think of virtual education, we're all thinking about a kid learning at home. Right. But understand, our Spanish model can be for both kids at home, and 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, Commission Member and ESC Region 5 Executive Director*

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.
- With greater scheduling flexibility and online content delivery, LEAs can create more 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 either hybrid or virtual. The same thing is true for public community and technical colleges– they have 83% of students 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, Principal, Dallas Hybrid Prep, Dallas ISD

“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 forward-looking models that deliver quality outcomes and greater opportunity for all Texas students. Existing virtual models in Texas, while innovative and forward-thinking for their time, 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 to achieve 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. The 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, you should draw a conclusion that 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 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, Josue 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 hybrid and virtual 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/stopgap 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 and school models (e.g. Alternative Education Accountability and standard A-F accountability ratings).

> *"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 and hybrid learning. We heard that with intentional design and planning, virtual and hybrid schools can be and will be successful in light of the appropriate staffing, scheduling, curriculum, instruction, engagement, and training." – Rex Gore, Chairman of Texas Commission on Virtual Education*

- ***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 toward sustainability. In the long run, Texas can benefit from 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: Ensure Student and Local Education Agency Eligibility Requirements are Consistent Across Models

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. These programs can 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 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, work-based learning, 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.

“Virtual instruction is really an opportunity for us to connect with industry experts that we cannot afford to have come into education... My take on the pandemic was that we were able to learn some really good best practices for how to deliver quality instruction virtually. If we can harness, enhance those, and expand upon what we're doing already, then I think that is an incredible tool that can further the workforce pipeline development. [...] That alignment with industry is really, really important.” - Sari McCoy, Executive Director of Career & Technical Education, Richardson ISD

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.

“Our history in virtual education has been very important to us. But we didn't start that journey through the pandemic. [...] First off, we had higher education come to us and honestly just tell us we weren't doing our job. And we listened about eight years ago, and they were right. They said that we were not doing the job of really preparing kids to learn in an independent setting, to be self-disciplined, to be able to work on their own, and to function well in a virtual world. And that was just eight years ago. And so we began the journey of really [understanding] what virtual education could do.” - Dr. Justin Terry, Superintendent, Forney ISD

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 at the time for 45 teaching jobs.” - Kurtis Indorf, Great Hearts Online

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 under SB15), the Commission believes advancing progress here will require virtual policies to evolve beyond a 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, statutes, and program requirements, 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 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. They also require effective strategies for personalizing learning to ensure students remain engaged and get the target supports they need, including special education and therapeutic services, to persevere when learning outside the classroom. Also, there must be assurances from LEAs that they will follow all state and federal laws for students with disabilities.

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 SB 15 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 funding-eligible 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, which 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 find 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 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 distinctions 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

Examples from the 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.

Dallas Hybrid Prep, Dallas ISD
Dallas Hybrid Prep is the first-of-its-kind hybrid elementary school serving students in grades three through eight in the state of Texas. It is a choice school, meaning that every child within the boundary of Dallas ISD can apply to the school. Enrollment in March of 2022 was 70 students, with plans to grow to 150 students this year. Ten of the families are actually "recapture" families from homeschool and private school environments. On Monday, Wednesdays, and Fridays, students learn online through synchronous and asynchronous work. On Tuesdays and Thursdays, students come to the building for core subjects as well as project-based learning, hands-on learning, and clubs.

"Wednesday is a very special time because Wednesday morning they work with our teachers online in structured interventions, and then in the afternoon, they engage in flexible enrichment because we truly believe that we have to engage the whole child. That means that our children will get African drumming, they will get recycled arts, they will take the Lion King performance, which is musical theater."

"61% of our students are from low socioeconomic status. 68% of our students are Hispanic, and 22% of our students are African-American. 54% of our students are male students. And then 46% of our students are female. So here's the thing. We've only had one discipline issue this year, and we attribute that to the great partnership that we have here and the model that is supporting the learning for these students that really needed a different type of model to be able to be successful."

"The other thing is our children are prepared and are equipped. Dallas has made a significant investment in technology. Every student in this school has two devices. Our kids have a Mac and they have an iPad, and they work seamlessly from one device to another. They have

access to online learning because we provide them with WiFi and then also we provide them transportation. That means that if the child qualifies for transportation, they come from every sector of Dallas and they can come to our school with no restrictions." - Dr. Olga Romero, Principal, Dallas Hybrid Prep

Great Hearts Online, Great Hearts Texas
Great Hearts Online is part of Great Hearts Texas, a public charter school network with 11 schools across the State of Texas, in San Antonio, Irving and Fort Worth serving 8000 students. In January 2021, they launched a full-time virtual academy, Great Hearts Online, that enrolled about 500 students across the state in grades K-8.

"We asked families, what would you deem to be most important to your child's success? Individual attention from teachers and regular academic feedback and communications. And we asked them what indicator of a child's success is most important to you. Families want their kids to love learning. They want their kids to love learning again. And so the love of learning, enjoyment of content, and the quality of teacher and student interactions are what families were looking for.

This year, we took the NWEA map assessment in December. Great Hearts Online Texas scholars... 72% of them are above the national average in math and 80% of them are above the national average in reading. This is 22% and 30% above the national average performance at that time of the year. These numbers are also higher than our already high-performing brick-and-mortar schools." - Kurtis Indorf, Chief Innovation Officer, Great Hearts Online

Rural Schools Innovation Zone, South Texas
Launched in 2019, the Rural Schools Innovation Zone (RSIZ) is a collaborative partnership between three districts, three higher education institutions, and numerous workforce partners, serving over 1,200 students in South Texas. Funded through TEA grants and Perkins funds, the RSIZ has developed a sustainable funding model through a payment structure that combines two incremental and proportional funding sources: per-pupil, cost-based tuition covered by CTE funding, and CCMR outcomes bonuses tied to the students who generate them. The model includes online courses, virtual professional development and collaboration, and wifi-equipped school buses.

Steve VanMatre, current Superintendent at Tuloso-Midway ISD and previously the leader of Premont ISD, explained the financial benefit and opportunity created by the RSIZ, saying, "I send more kids to [Falfurrias in Brooks County] and Freer than they send to me. I had to pay a little over $175,000 last school year to the Rural Schools Innovation Zone. And by doing that, I was able to send any of my kids... to any of those academies. I couldn't build a health science academy, a welding academy, a carpentry lab... for $175,000... It was well worth that."

Impact data out of RSIZ includes:
- 4x increase in the percent of students completing a dual credit course, from 15% in 2018-2019 to 63% in 2020-2021;
- The RSIZ has outperformed the state and surrounding regions in CCMR score, graduation rate, and dual credit completion; and

- The RSIZ has closed gaps against the state in almost all categories, with 78% eco-dis students, compared to the state average of 52% of students being eco-dis.

“The experiences with the RSIZ cannot be found anywhere else. We get that one-to-one learning with teachers and get to explore different certifications and careers. The academies open your eyes to things you never thought about in your career path." - Premont ISD student

"The RSIZ is raising expectations for our students, taking them from a place of low expectations to high expectations and giving opportunities that they may never have had.” - Freer ISD Teacher

Specific Policy Recommendations

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

- Modify Texas Education Code Chapter 30A with one clear framework for virtual, hybrid, and supplemental programs to replace current fragmented rules and statutes
- Establish a TEA approval process for new full-time virtual or hybrid schools and programs that includes a required planning year to verify that high-quality design criteria are met
    a. Recommended criteria includes, but is not limited to:
        i. Academic plan with evidence of TEKS-aligned curriculum and instructional practices, evidence of progress monitoring and interventions, plan for meeting the needs of and adhering to related state and federal law for special populations and at-risk students
        ii. Operational plan which includes staffing model, selected school leader, learning objectives for required professional development and job-embedded coaching, student and family engagement, school calendar and schedules, enrollment plans, cyber security and student data privacy measures
- Create a separate approval process for current Texas programs and providers to receive a fast track approval and a “grace period year” to operate while moving toward formal approval in the new system, while verifying that high-quality design criteria are met
    a. Recommended criteria includes, but is not limited to:
        i. Outcomes data, including student outcomes and operational performance data
        ii. Academic plan with evidence of TEKS-aligned curriculum and instructional practices, evidence of progress monitoring and interventions, plan for meeting the needs of and adhering to related state and federal law for special populations and at-risk students
        iii. Operational plan which includes staffing model, selected school leader, learning objectives for required professional development and job-embedded coaching, student and family engagement, school calendar and schedules, enrollment plans, cyber security and student data privacy measures

- Ensure special populations (e.g. students with disabilities including Dyslexia, students who are identified emergent bilingual, English learners, gifted and talented, highly-mobile and/or identified as 'at-risk') have access to all state and federally-required rights
- Consider aligning requirements for approval processes to national standards for high-quality virtual learning programs (e.g. National Standards for Quality Online Learning, Quality Matters, Online Learning Consortium)

A2: Ensure Student and Local Education Agency Eligibility Requirements are Consistent Across Models

- 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 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: 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."-- Dr. Diann Huber, Founder, 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 Lovett, 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."* Lovett also noted that virtual teachers working across campuses have access to other experts in ways they did not in smaller schools, 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 of 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 Texas 2036."*

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

<u>Reduce the burden of approval processes and funding uncertainty to encourage growth in Supplemental course options that offer high-quality virtual experiences.</u> While students can tap into opportunities through the TXVSN, 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.

<u>Increase local education agency incentives to inform families and students and encourage pursuit of supplementary opportunities.</u> Any Texas public school student may enroll in a TXVSN course, but they must do so through their home LEA. A student may enroll in more than three courses, but LEAs are only required to pay for up to three courses., . 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.

Guthrie Common School District, Texas
Guthrie Community School District is a TXVSN supplemental course catalog provider; instead of offering a full-time virtual or hybrid program, they offer supplemental courses via the TXVSN catalog.

Guthrie, Texas, is a small town. “There are definitely more cattle and horses than anything in our little, little town. But we love our rural communities, we love our small school families,” explains Virtual School Program Administrator Summer Reel. In 2011, Guthrie CSD met with Rosetta Stone and the Texas Virtual School Network (TXVSN), where they were invited to build Spanish courses to offer to students across the state. The Guthrie school board granted approval to move forward with the plan, and they submitted Spanish courses for review and inclusion in the TXVSN catalog, which debuted later that year. By the end of their first year, they had served 250-300 students, trained and added additional teachers to the GVS team, and began developing additional courses for the catalog. “I believe we were the smallest provider school district participating in the Texas Virtual School Network at the time,” Reel told the commission.

Since then, Guthrie has seen their course enrollment increase substantially. At its height, Guthrie served over 900 students during the 2014-2015 school year. They have added a dozen new courses to the TXVSN catalog since their first offerings in 2011, mostly due to a Texas Virtual School Network grant, including STEM classes.

Texas College Bridge
The Texas College Bridge program provides high school juniors and seniors with online college preparatory courses in English language arts and mathematics. The Texas College Bridge courses point to the potential of virtual education by allowing students to participate in a self-paced and teacher-facilitated curriculum aligned to meet the Texas TSIA standards.

Commissioner Mike Morath explained, “Let's say a student is getting close to graduation, but they have not yet demonstrated a college-level proficiency in reading, or in mathematics. Maybe they have passed their EOC, but that's different than demonstrating a sort of college readiness. The Texas College Bridge is an asynchronous course sequence that we made universally available throughout the state for English and math and free to districts until June 2024. Kids can take these courses and satisfy a CCMR Accountability indicator and earn a TSIA exemption with partnering colleges and universities. So it's... designed to be asynchronous, but gives a teacher full visibility into what a student grasps and what they need to master.”

Texas College Bridge provides options for the HB5 College Preparatory Courses. Details of the program include the following:

All Texas public school LEAs can access (through June 2024):

- No-cost, online, adaptive college preparatory course curriculum for HB 5 College Preparatory English language arts and mathematics (EdReady).
- Competency-based progression aligned with college readiness exams like ACT and SAT
- Dashboards to monitor and adjust student progress.
- Professional development for teacher facilitators, district coordinators, and counselors/advisors. Student-facing college and career planning tools, activities, and trackers.

As a Texas College Bridge grantee LEAs receive:

- Funding to implement the program locally. Funding may be used for:
    - teacher stipends for successful student completion (up to $100 per student per subject).
    - counselor stipends for student completion of counseling/advising online modules (up to $100 per student).
    - TSIA testing for participating students ($8 per student).
- Flexibility in program implementation
- Access to all supports available to any Texas public school.

To date, 374 LEAs have accessed Texas College Bridge online courses, with 34,724 active English students and 39,251 active math students. Texas students have completed 4,172 English certifications and6,378 math certifications thus far.

Tennessee AP Access for ALL

The Tennessee AP Access for ALL (APAA) is a partnership between the Tennessee Department of Education and a local family foundation, the Niswonger Foundation, to expand access to AP courses by offering virtual asynchronous courses to students across the state. The goal of the program is to give every public Tennessee high school student the opportunity to take free online Advanced Placement classes for college credit.

“Teachers that are a part of the AP Access for all program are a mixture of recently retired educators, as well as Tennessee educators who are working in their home district. And so educators who are working in a district are limited to taking on two core sections. We don't want them to take on a full additional load of 5 to 6 classes,” explained Zachary Adams of TN APAA. The program offers teachers the opportunity to complete AP College Board certification for free and awards mini-grants for AP teachers to purchase needed supplies, textbooks, and software for their students.

“Our foundation also hires a school-based contact. It's usually a school counselor, usually the AP coordinator for the school who's sort of coordinating testing for all of their on-the-ground, traditional AP classes. And so if an AP Access for ALL teacher notices that one of their students isn't logging on or is falling behind in their work, they can flag that for the school-based contact. And that school-based contact can set up a family meeting, can follow up with the student just to kind of see if there's anything they can do to support them with their online AP. That school-based person is really critical to supporting students because for the majority of students who are enrolled in this program, their home districts are assigning them to a study

hall where they can do this work during the school day." - Zachary Adams, TN AP Access for ALL

Student access to AP courses continues to grow with the program. There was a 52% increase in the number of schools enrolling students in Spring 2022 when compared to Fall 2021 enrollment. Over 1,800 students are taking 15 different AP courses in the program's first year. Course options have increased to 18 different AP courses this fall. In total, 109 Tennessee school systems, representing 192 schools, are participating in the program, which accounts for 88% of all public school systems in the state. The average number of course offerings increased by 63% after high schools begin participating in APAA.

Specific Policy Recommendations

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

- Ensure long-term provision of supplemental course catalog by phase-in of new supplemental course catalog statute as part of the new policy framework
- Simplify process for course approval and course updates that allows the certification and regular recertification of a program or provider, while verifying that high-quality design criteria are met
    - Recommended criteria includes, but is not limited to:
        - Outcomes data including student outcomes and operational performance data
        - Academic plan with evidence of TEKS-aligned curriculum and instructional practices, evidence of progress monitoring and interventions, plan for meeting the needs of and adhering to related state and federal law for special populations and at-risk students
        - Operational plan which includes staffing model, learning objectives for required professional development and job-embedded coaching, cyber security and student data privacy measures
- Create a separate approval process for current Texas supplemental programs and providers (e.g. TXVSN Course Catalog providers) to receive a fast track approval and a "grace period year" to operate while moving toward formal approval in the new system, while verifying that high-quality design criteria are met
    - Recommended criteria includes, but is not limited to:
        - Outcomes data including student outcomes and operational performance data
        - Academic plan with evidence of TEKS-aligned curriculum and instructional practices, evidence of progress monitoring and interventions, plan for meeting the needs of and adhering to related state and federal law for special populations and at-risk students
        - Operational plan which includes staffing model, learning objectives for required professional development and job-embedded coaching, cyber security and student data privacy measures
- Ensure special populations (e.g. students with disabilities including Dyslexia, students who are identified emergent bilingual, English learners, gifted and talented, highly-mobile and/or

identified as 'at-risk') have access to all state and federally-required rights
- Consider aligning requirements for approval processes to national standards for high-quality virtual learning programs (e.g. National Standards for Quality Online Learning, Quality Matters, Online Learning Consortium)

B2: Require LEAs To Create Mechanisms for Informing Students and Families of Opportunities

- Ensure an LEA parent notification requirement, similar to existing statute (TEC 30A.007 a-1), is included in the new policy framework and enforced
    - Include how to access supplemental course catalog offerings, process for enrollment, and relevant definitions
    - Share data security measures in virtual school report card

Related Funding Considerations Discussed in Objective F, Section IX:

F3: Establish Supplemental Course Threshold for Reporting Students as Virtual Students

- Establish a threshold that treats students as either a virtual or an in-person student using a 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)

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 a 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, or 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,travel for school or sporting event). In these cases, targeted virtual support is needed 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/stopgap learning, under which conditions, for whom, and for how long. Currently, districts provide individual emergency support, and may receive funding for it via “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. District and ESC leaders testified that while TEA works really hard on this, sometimes by the time the agency rules on a waiver request, the emergency is already 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
    - Allow LEAs to partner with Education Service Centers, other LEAs, and approved virtual, hybrid, and supplemental entities to implement emergency learning plans

Related Funding Considerations Discussed in Objective F, Section IX:

F5: Clarify Emergency/Stopgap Funding to Ensure Access to High-Quality Instruction

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

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
D5: Provide Professional Development for Emergency or Stopgap Virtual Education

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 [virtual] 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 of 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 and Master Teacher

Educators need support and programs to build these skills. The Commission heard from numerous teachers about their excitement about being part of this future. As professional learning expert, Dr. Diann Huber of iTeach noted, *"with regards to preparing teachers to instruct students in a 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 an 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 stopgap environments.

> *"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." – Dr. Heather Greenhalgh-Spencer, Associate Dean, Texas Tech University*

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 learning. 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 all teachers to receive this training on top of a long list of current requirements. For those teachers voluntarily choosing to teach in a virtual environment, however, we do recommend some form of required professional development. 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 recordthrough 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 micro-credentials so they can be placed on their certificate so parents and districts know this individual has gone the extra mile to demonstrate competency to deliver [this] instruction."-- Dr. Diann Huber, Founder, iTeach*

Specific Policy Recommendations to Achieve This Objective

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

- For teachers in our workforce already, direct TEA in partnerships with ESCs and LEAs to provide professional development offerings for existing teachers aligned with research-based best practices in high-quality virtual/hybrid learning, engaging with key stakeholders and subject-matter experts
- Teachers who choose to teach in a virtual program must complete professional

development aligned to research-based best practices for virtual learning
    - For teachers currently teaching in a virtual, hybrid, or supplemental program, LEAs may determine that previous experience teaching in a virtual program or prior professional development related to virtual learning pedagogy fulfills this expectation

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

- For teachers in the pipeline, require the State Board for Educator Certification (SBEC), with stakeholder engagement, to define and provide a framework for hybrid/virtual learning training that can be embedded into educator preparation programs (EPPs), including virtual pedagogy and using virtual 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
- Direct TEA and SBEC to engage stakeholders during the creation of and planning for the micro-credential program
- Incentivize, rather than require, accelerated uptake of high-quality professional development for interested teachers and districts, in the form of paying for the micro-credential and a stipend for the time to earn it

D4: Providing Guardrails To Deliver Virtual Learning with Excellence

- Teachers should not be required to teach virtually outside of stopgap/emergency scenarios
- Teachers should not teach concurrently

D5: Provide Professional Development for Emergency or Stopgap Virtual Education

- In the case of emergency/stopgap situations, direct TEA in partnership with ESCs to provide professional development offerings if the local LEA cannot provide it

Educator perspectives on transitioning to virtual teaching 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 Community School District 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 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

Examples of Professional Learning Programs

Del Valle ISD, Texas
Del Valle ISD outside of Austin serves 11,080 students, 89% of whom are deemed economically disadvantaged, and 46% of whom are emergent bilingual. The district leverages a locally developed curriculum based on priority standards, strong literacy instruction, and purposeful feedback through instruction. They created a Virtual Professional Learning Academy with tailored sessions for virtual instruction, and a professional Learning Hub for ease of access to professional learning for all teachers, in addition to creating a tiered professional development framework called Del Valle University.

"So with building a model or building a curriculum, we also have to train our teachers to be able to use that curriculum," explains Laura Carlin-Gonzalez, Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction at Del Valle ISD. "So we're building it, using our teacher leaders, using our curriculum staff. And then we're training all of our teachers on how to effectively use the curriculum. So through a virtual model, you are able or we were also able to develop virtual professional learning. And so we launched in 2020 a 100% virtual professional learning academy where we had a hub, each teacher when you navigated through the site, that was very easily navigated, we're able to pick their pathways... This was all synchronous, which means that was live instruction from our curriculum coordinators, our instructional coaches or our teacher leaders, whoever was teaching the particular sessions. So this was tailored for virtual instruction and delivered virtually for our teachers."

The district also leveraged train-the-trainer modules. Carlin-Gonzalez explained, "We created trainer of trainer modules. We rolled that out... from this curriculum instruction team to campus instructional leadership teams in a series of modules over time. And so we started with just "what are the requirements of the hybrid model? What does that look like all the way through inclusion and co-teaching, in-person and remote learners?" And so we rolled that out once every week so that they were able to turn around to their staff so that we would be ready by the time we had some of our students return in person. Again, this is a model that could be flexible in order to meet the needs of whatever the district may need if they're launching a virtual academy."

“We have in our district taken our work a step further with professional learning and developed what we are calling Del Valle University. It is launching this year, and we've created a series of courses over the next four years with the labels Fundamentals, Methods, Masters, and Advanced Masters. And we've decided what does it take to be a wonderful teacher, great teacher, highly effective teacher... to meet the needs of our students?”

Lastly, Del Valle also leveraged their “daily six” instructional strategies. Carlin-Gonzalez shared, “There are six strategies that we hold firm to and we expect to see in every classroom, and that doesn't waver in a virtual instruction classroom... like frequent feedback and frequent talk, but in a virtual setting, using things like flip grid, breakout rooms, hand signals, polls and Google classroom, those kinds of things to still meet those instructional strategies. And we trained them on that during our professional learning for teachers. Again, our model isn't changing. Our expectation isn't changing when we go to a virtual model. We're just helping them tailor their instruction to be able to deliver it in a virtual manner.”

Educator Prep Program, Graduate School of Education, Texas Tech University
Texas Tech University’s Graduate School of Education graduates around 500 students each year, of which 95% are fully certified to teach through their educator preparatory program. According to the university, 89% of graduates feel prepared during their first year of teaching. Heather Greenhalgh-Spencer, Ph.D., is an associate professor in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction at Texas Tech University, where she focuses on Educational Technology, Pedagogical Innovation, Diversity and Equity Issues, and Global Studies.

To support their teachers, Texas Tech has honed in on what the research says works best. As Dr. Greenhalgh-Spencer explained, “So here's what we know from research when we're thinking about how you prepare teachers, both in-service and pre-service teachers. And there's actually a lot of research on this, especially in the last ten years. We know 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, as the teacher folks were saying, to the grade level and content area of the teacher. It cannot be generic. If you're trying to really make a difference. It has to be job-embedded. While book studies are great and serve a lovely purpose 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 contains a loopback or continuous coaching cycle. It's not come take a three-hour seminar and then call it good. Done. You know how to teach online. That's not the best way to do this. We know that having those continuous cycles makes a big difference.”

“When we look at PD and teacher preparation, a lot of times we hear the adage, you can have it highly effective, easily scalable, or low cost. Pick one. And I think that's a little pessimistic. But what we do know is that there are differences between high touch, medium touch and low touch options when you're thinking of teacher preparation for a pre-service, as well as continuing professional development for in-service. When you think about high-touch options, you think about how can we get it to be job-embedded. How can we get it to have multiple rounds of feedback? How can we have some asynchronous and synchronous options so teachers can actually see what it looks like to even be in a classroom with synchronous and asynchronous modalities? One of the problems we found out is that teachers, when they were suddenly thrown online, had a really hard time because many of them could not even imagine

what it looks like to be a teacher online. So having them be a student online, learning how to be a teacher online is even just one step in the right direction. That doesn't have to be their whole career. That doesn't have to be their whole teacher training. But again, understanding what good online teaching looks like is helpful from just your sense of understanding what you might need to do when you are a teacher in an online space or even just using technology. Medium touch options tend to have a little less personalization, but they tend to be more scalable. And then low touch options tend to be things like a webinar or an asynchronous space where you go in and you watch some videos and you take some multiple choice questions and then you're done. That's a good way to deliver information, but it's not a good way to teach a practice. And that's what teaching is: a practice."

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 for Programs 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** **E4: Monitor Implementation of Virtual Programs and Student Outcomes Related to Policy Changes**

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.” --Dr. Chris Bigenho, Director of 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 with in-person schools. Programs and schools should be rated separately and considered as part of the overall district performance. As Senator Paul Bettencourt, Commission Member, said, *“Because what gets measured, gets fixed.”* If a district is using a teacher of record from a vendor, the performance of the students enrolled with that vendor should also 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 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.” – Dr. Danny Lovett, ESC Region 5 Executive Director and Commission Member

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 that emphasize building on research-based practices and that provide targeted support and connect teams to experts and peers.

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 of Guthrie Community School District 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.

This will include ensuring students have access to in-person adult coaches and support. Commission member Sen. Royce West noted the critical role of a parent or guardian: *“the support of a parent in this particular learning mode is directly related to the success of the student at younger grade levels and potentially directly related to the success of the student in the public school.”* As Dr. Greenhalgh-Spencer of Texas Tech University pointed out, “*That's true in online. That's true in brick-and-mortar, especially at those primary grade levels, those early childhood levels. Having that parental engagement makes a huge difference.”* In cases where parents may not be available to play this role, providers will need to work to identify these supports. In testimony, experts offered several ways existing virtual schools were tackling this problem through connections with community organizations as well as opening up shared learning spaces on brick-and-mortar campuses where students can go for coaching.

Establish clear access and supports for special populations. Planning expectations should explicitly address open enrollment access as well as mechanisms to support special needs, including the provision of IEP-related, multilingual, and other therapeutic services. Dr. Mary Rice of the University of New Mexico noted, *“the first myth is that parents with children with*

disabilities don't desire online learning opportunities for their children. And the reality is that actually many parents with disabilities would prefer at least some online learning environment."

"In any educational program, if you design a program, specifically from the foundation up, for children with disabilities, children with special needs, children in special populations, it's going to work better for everybody... Planning for these kiddos first will make the entire program stronger in general."- Dr. Justin Porter, Associate Commissioner, Special Populations Programs and Policy, TEA

Specific Policy Recommendations

E1: Creation of Strong Approval & Recertification Process for Programs With An Emphasis on Planning and Design

- Creation of a strong approval process for full-time virtual, hybrid, and supplemental programs as stated above in recommendations A1 and B1 of this report
    - After approval, require TEA to recertify programs at Year 3 and every subsequent 5-year marks (e.g. Year 3, Year 8, Year 13) based on outcomes data including student outcomes and operational performance

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

- Virtual and hybrid programs should have an accountability system that is as close to the in-person accountability system as possible (e.g. Standard A-F accountability and Alternative Education Accountability)
- For full-time virtual and hybrid programs, TEA should assign the program separate accountability ratings as if the program were a campus of the LEA
    - If the LEA partners with an outside provider, the provider will also receive the same accountability rating as the program
    - Direct TEA to require LEAs to include data sharing agreement in the virtual program report card

E3: Publish Historic Performance of Virtual and Hybrid Providers

- Direct TEA to publish on their website the historic performance of full-time, hybrid, and supplemental programs and providers to provide transparency for families and students about available options
    - Include relevant definitions (e.g. synchronous, asynchronous) and information about program characteristics, program type (e.g. hybrid, virtual, dropout recovery program), and student demographic information
- Direct TEA to include virtual program outcomes in the overall LEA report card, but clearly reported separately

E4: Monitor Implementation of Virtual Programs and Student Outcomes Related to Policy Changes

- Request that the Legislature include a future interim charge to monitor the implementation of new virtual education 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: Establish Supplemental Course Threshold for Reporting Students as Virtual Students
F4: Support Multi-District, Cross-Sector, Rural Pathway Partnerships
F5: Clarify Emergency/Stopgap 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 the 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. As LEAs and providers navigate the development and launch of models, they need additional support and technical assistance to ensure 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 offer 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 supporting 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 are needed for the 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." —Dr. Chris Bigenho, Director of 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 an outsized impact on 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 are a barrier to participation.* Under the current statute, students wishing to enroll in supplemental courses do so through their LEA, and enrollment is limited to three courses per semester. In most cases (excepting 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 these courses. This is particularly true for smaller schools and LEAs where student enrollment may have a bigger impact on staffing and financial stability.
- *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, 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 TEA with additional FTE funding to adequately support new and existing virtual programs and related administrative needs

F3: Establish Supplemental Course Threshold for Reporting Students as Virtual Students

- Establish a threshold that treats students as either a virtual or an in-person student using a 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)

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/Stopgap Funding to Ensure Access to High-Quality Instruction

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

X. FUNDING ESTIMATES AND IMPLICATIONS

The Commission recognizes its recommendations will require a significant state commitment of new funding for formulas and targeted investments in planning, professional learning, and Agency capacity to offer technical assistance and oversight over time. It strongly believes these investments are necessary to achieve a shared vision for high-quality, flexible virtual and hybrid learning experiences that open up new avenues for opportunity, and excellence for all Texas students, families, and educators. Additional study and data collection is required to accurately project the financial implications of their implementation. **The Commission, therefore, directs the Texas Education Agency to conduct a detailed cost analysis of proposed changes**.

However, based on research conducted, the Commission would offer the following high-level estimates.

Rough Fiscal Estimate of TCVE Proposed Strategies:

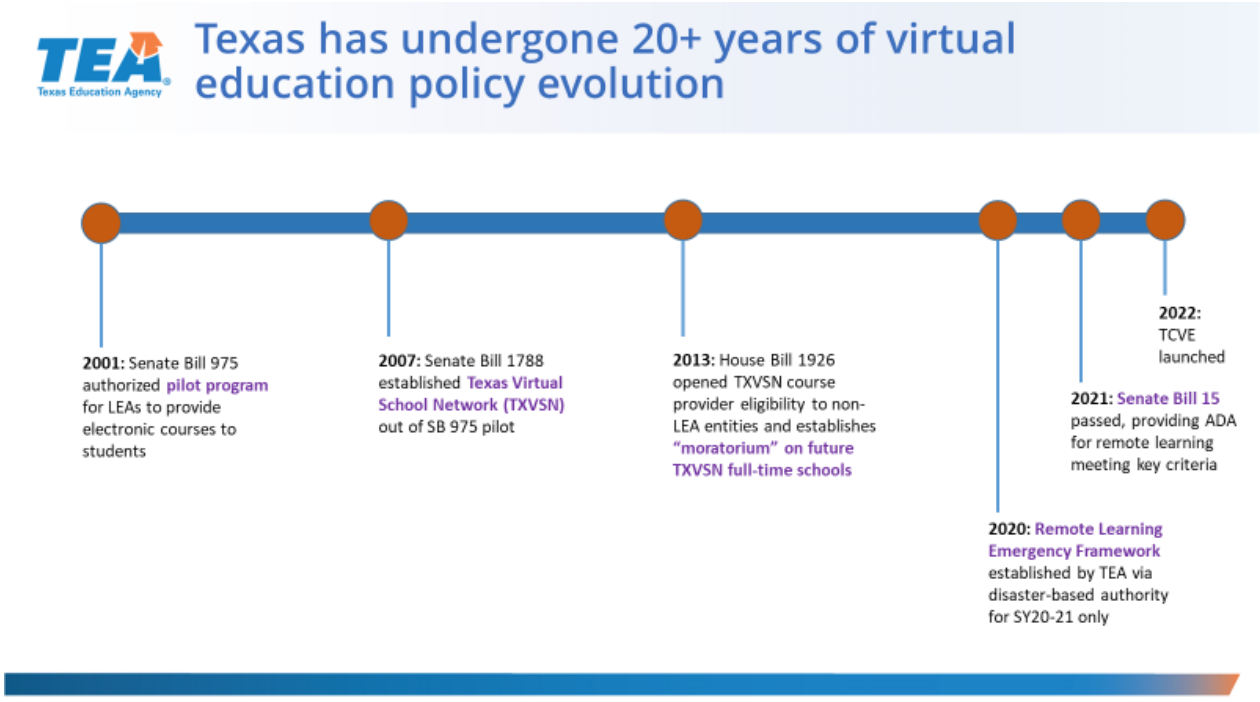
[TEA has provided estimated funding ranges. Actual fiscal note amounts will depend on bill language.]

Cost Area	Range of Cost	Type of Cost	Key Cost Factors / Assumptions / Notes
1. Fund SB 15 funding-ineligible students	$70,000,000 - $80,000,000 -	Annual	● These students were accounted for in the prior Foundation School Program (FSP) budget and LEAs would otherwise receive ADA funding for them ● Funding for SB 15 funding-ineligible students (e.g. did not meet prior year academic performance criteria) ● 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 adjusted enrollment of 9,217 o ADA level selected for cost neutrality – 92.38% (2019) ● Assuming cost per student of $8,321
2. Conversion of Current TXVSN Full-time Online Students from ADA-based to Enrollment-Based Funding	$10,000,000 - $15,000,000	Annual	● Conversion of current TXVSN full-time online students from ADA-based to enrollment-based funding ● 38,498 students were enrolled as TXVSN full-time online students based on the 2021-2022 Fall PEIMS snapshot ● Based on adjusted enrollment of 35,564 minus current virtual ADA of 34,055 with completion based method (net increase of 1,509) o ADA level selected for cost neutrality – 92.38% (2019) ● Assuming cost per student of $8,32
3. Students Joining the Public School System and Out-of-State Students Who Have Recently	~ $45,000,000	Annual	● Cost of $8,321 per student (consistent with Rows #1 and #2 above) ● Estimated 0.5% of ~750,000 total homeschool students switching to a virtual/hybrid school option, based on latest Texas Home School Coalition estimates (~$28.8M) ○ ADA level selected for cost neutrality – 92.38% (2019)

Moved to Texas			● Estimated 0.5% of ~250,000 private school students switching to a public virtual/hybrid school option, based on latest Texas Private Schools Association estimate (~$9.6M) ○ ADA level selected for cost neutrality – 92.38% (2019) ● Additional estimates are needed to consider out of state students who have recently moved to Texas and may be interested in virtual/hybrid options
4. Startup grant and technical assistance for virtual/hybrid programs	~$3,750,000	Annual	● Funding level for a technical assistance program for new virtual/hybrid school programs; assumption of 15 programs supported annually, with startup and technical assistance grants at ~$250,000 each across one planning year and one implementation year of support
5. TEA FTE and administrative cost	~$1,250,000 - ~$2,000,000	Annual	● Low-end range: Estimated cost for 3 FTEs (1 manager, 2 education specialists) - support expansion of full-time virtual/hybrid school options, management of approval processes for operators, and management of technical assistance program in Row #5 ● High-end range: Estimated cost for 3 FTEs noted above and 2 FTEs (1 manager, 1 education specialist) required to support Teacher PD and Micro Credentialing system buildout (Rows #6-7) ● Administrative costs associated with new structures for accountability, funding reporting, program approval processes, and system updates for supplemental offerings
6. Virtual Teacher PD + Stipends reaching 2-5% of teachers in the state	$8,000,000 - $20,000,000	One-time over multiple years	● Teacher stipend amount (assumption of $1,000) ● Reach level in state (assumption of 2-5%) ● Low vs. high touch training ● Block grant structure and funding cap on number of stipends may be necessary based on budgetary conditions
7. Micro-Credentialing system development	$600,000 - $700,000	One-time	● Includes upfront IT costs; additional costs may be involved in establishing and promoting a virtual learning-specific micro-credential
8. Rural School Partnerships	$20,000,000 - $30,000,000	Annual	● Per student additional benefit for LEAs implementing Rural School Innovation Zone (RSIZ)-style structures; this is not a true estimate of demand, but a proposed “cap” amount for coverage

XI. APPENDICES

A. TIMELINE AND OVERVIEW OF EXISTING TEXAS VIRTUAL EDUCATION POLICY



B. OVERVIEW OF TESTIMONY

The Commission held over 37 hours of testimony. The input from all of the participating students, parents, teachers, leaders, policy-makers, and other experts was instrumental to the development of this report. In the table below, we summarize the presentation topics and offer additional notable quotes that were not directly cited but shaped findings and recommendations. Presenters are listed by testimony date in the order shown in the table below.

Presenter List

February 23, 2022
Texas Education Agency, Mike Morath, Commissioner of Education
Operation Connectivity, Gabby Roe, Project Lead
March 30, 2022
Digital Learning Collaborative - John Watson, Founder
Region 5 Education Service Center- Dr. Danny Lovett, Executive Director
Guthrie Common School District- Summer Reel, Virtual School Program Administrator

Lewisville ISD- Dr. Chris Bigenho, Director of Virtual Learning Academy
Great Hearts Online (Texas)- Kurtis Indorf, Chief Innovation Officer, Michelle Mendelhall, Educator , Emily Sullivan, Headmaster, Raquel Zapata, Parent/Director of Academy Operations
Dallas ISD- Dr. Michael Hinojosa, Superintendent, Susana Cordova, Deputy Superintendent, Dr. Olga Romero, Principal, Dallas Hybrid Prep
Texas Tech University- Dr. Justin Louder, AVP Academic Innovation, Cari Moye, Principal, TTU K-12 Online, Dr. Lisa S. Leach, Senior Director of Instructional Design and Curriculum Development
April 27, 2022
TN AP for All - Zachary Adams, Director of Postsecondary Coordination & Alignment, TN Board of Regents
Village High School (Colorado)- Nathan Gorsch, Founding Principal
ASU Prep Digital (Arizona) - Julie Young, Managing Director, Lisa Edgar, Chief Partnership Officer
Florida Virtual School (Florida)- Dr. Louis Algaze, President/CEO
State of Utah- Senator Howard Stephenson
June 29, 2022
Texas Education Agency- Alexis Bauserman, Director of College, Career, and Military Preparation
TX 2036- John Hryhorchuk, Senior Vice President of Policy and Advocacy
Permian Strategic Partnership- Molly Young, PSP Director of Education Initiatives, Tracy Bentley, PSP CEO and President- Superintendent Dr. Scott Muri, Ector County ISD
Rural School Innovation Zone- Superintendent Steve VanMatre, Premont ISD
State of North Dakota- Kirsten Baesler, State School Superintendent
CareerWise Colorado- Ryan Gensler, Sr. Director of National Partnerships
Aldine ISD- Diana Del Pilar, Principal, Avalos P-TECH Early College High School
City of Fort Worth- Mayor Maddie Parker
Forney ISD- Dr. Justin Terry, Superintendent
Richardson ISD- Sari McCoy, Executive Director of Career & Technical Education

July 27, 2022
Texas Education Agency - Megha Kansra, Associate Commissioner of District Planning and Supports, Jessica McLoughlin, Director of Educator Standards, Testing, and Preparation
Texas Tech University- Dr. Heather Greenhalgh- Spencer, Associate Dean
Digital Learning Annual Conference- Allison Powell, Director
Texas Classroom Teachers Association- Holly Eaton, Director of Professional Development and Advocacy
Association of Texas Professional Educators- Andrea Chevalier, Lobbyist
Texas State Teachers Association- Carrie Griffith, Government Relations and Policy Specialist
Educate Texas- Ryan Franklin, Senior Director, Policy & Advocacy
iTeach- Diann Huber, Founder
Engage2Learn- Chris Everett, COO, Kami Green, Chief of Partner Success
Texas Computer Education Association- Jennifer Bergland, Director of Governmental Relations, Lori Gracey, Executive Director
Quality Matters- Christine Voelker, Director, K12 Program
Panel: Texas Virtual Educators- Summer Reel, Guthrie Community School District, Natasha Rodriguez Perez, Dallas Hybrid Prep, Beth Sauer, Great Hearts Online, Bethany Weston, Denton ISD, Lindsey Yost, Texas Tech K-12
August 23, 2022
Elevation School Cherry Creek- Kristy Hart, Principal with students J'Lee Brown and Ray Reiswrig
The Learning Accelerator (TLA)- Dr. Beth Rabbitt, CEO
Texas Education Agency- Dr. Justin Porter, Associate Commissioner, Special Populations Programs and Policy
Trinity Charter Schools- Keely Reynolds, Superintendent, Andrew Benscoter, Chief Education & Growth Officer, Sonja Cornejo, Principal
TeleTeachers- Emily Smith, CEO
Teletherapy with Presence and Andrews ISD- Kate Eberly Walker, CEO Presence, Trina Falcon, Director of Special Education, Andrews ISD
InnovateEDU/ Educating All Learners Alliance- Erin Mote, Executive Director

University of New Mexico- Dr. Mary Rice, Assistant Professor of Literacy
August 24, 2022
Del Valle ISD- Dr. Annette Tielle, Superintendent, Dr. Carlin-Gonzalez, Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum, Dr. Sonja Howard, Director, Mishima Hansen, Director of Bilingual Programs
Humble ISD- Dr. Elizabeth Fagan, Superintendent
Public Testimony- Anabel Garza, Parent
Public Testimony- Melissa Barbee, Parent
Public Testimony- Laura Stegner, Parent
Public Testimony- Ricelso Bavo, Parent

Testimony Quotes
Supporting materials for testimony can be access via the TEA website: https://tea.texas.gov/academics/learning-support-and-programs/texas-commission-on-virtual-education

February 23, 2022	
Texas Education Agency Mike Morath, Commissioner of Education	*"The hybrid learning environment [....] is very promising as an innovation in the future, but it takes a lot of intentional planning and thought to launch effectively."* *"There is actually a really significant issue that is worthy of considering, which is the concept of management specialization. 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. And so the idea of an individual district trying to serve all of their students equally in this way might make less sense than the ability for individual school districts to partner with entities that have that degree of management specialization and can do that."* *"The averages can sometimes hide the outliers. And I think it will be very useful for this body to talk to the outliers, to understand, to try to discern patterns in what was true among the outliers. [...] What decisions did they make managerially? We know, for example, that Frisco was a noticeable outlier to the good. We also know that Frisco did very, very little concurrent instruction all year. Last year, they spent a great deal of time*

	and energy between the two school years, making sure their instructional systems were equipped to make this change." *"The full-time virtual learning programs that you'll see that get pretty strong results, actually sit down and do a kind of a family interview with families before the families then choose remote instruction to make sure that there are appropriate family supports."*
Operation Connectivity Gabby Roe, Project Lead	"*We really can say that we went from being way off the mark 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."* *"There there are dramatic improvements in technology that have taken place in the last 24 months that we believe the broadband development office has the knowledge and wherewithal to make sure districts are able to take advantage of and families are able to take advantage of. And we're there to support them."* *"We have never been on a faster track than we are today, and two of the most significant "boxes" have been improved dramatically, which are our technical knowledge and funding."*
March 30, 2022	
Digital Learning Collaborative John Watson, Founder	"*I'm convinced, based on working in this field for more than two decades, that digital learning in all its forms can create opportunities and better outcomes for students. I've seen these positive outcomes in the states, in the schools that we work with, in the students that we interview, that we conduct surveys with, that we focus groups within the research that we do. And also in my own extended family."* *"Digital learning isn't a silver bullet. We don't believe that just adding technology magically makes a school or a program work or work well. We know that digital learning in all its forms needs to be well-planned and well-implemented to be successful. That really starts with a role for the state with thoughtful laws and regulations. It extends to supporting districts through the work of the state education agency and service centers and other agencies through the school and district leadershipand down to individual teachers and students."* *"Emergency remote learning during the pandemic was implemented with little planning. By necessity, it was intended to be temporary. Therefore, onboarding of students into the online platforms was limited. Support for teachers was limited by design because it all happened so fast. None of these limitations are true of the types of online and hybrid schools."*

	“I would love to have you consider the idea that you look at all the ideas under your view, through the lens of what is best for each and every student. Now some people are going to think, Well, that's an obvious point and it's already being done. But nearly every day I come across policies and decisions that are outmoded, they're outdated. They're based very clearly on something other than what is best for each and every student.”
Region 5 Education Service Center Dr. Danny Lovett, Executive Director	*“The school does supply a classroom aide or a paraprofessional who's in the classroom at all times with the students, and that is absolutely critical to the success of the program. Our teachers meet with those aides face-to-face personally at the start of the school year, and we also do some other face-to-face things during the school year. [...] One of the most critical meetings to the success of the program is that beginning of the school year meeting and developing that rapport and that relationship with that educational aide for this program, this type of program to be successful, that teacher and that educational aide have to be absolute partners in this process.”* *“Do our teachers like this? Absolutely. We have very little turnover among our teachers. We started with two teachers 15 years ago. Both of those teachers are still with us, and most of the teachers we've hired over the years do tend to remain with the service center.”* *“I think one of the things that hurt us when we went to emergency virtual instruction overnight like we did during COVID — we didn't get to set up expectations. Our teachers talk extensively about how they go and they meet with those students face-to-face before the school year begins or the first day of school, and they set out those expectations. They tell them, ‘this is going to be different. This is not like the class you were at the period before or the period after. Here's what we expect from you. Here's how we expect you to behave. Here's what you have to do for this to be successful for you.’”* *“For 13 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.”*
Guthrie Common School District Summer Reel, Virtual School	*“We have always been committed as educators and community members and parents to making sure that the parents like us who decided this is how they wanted to raise their kids, there would not be a lack of opportunities for them. They would still have the opportunity to pursue educationally the pursuits that were important to them, the activities that*

Program Administrator	*are important to them. [...] We want to make sure our kids have the opportunity to participate in and succeed in everything. So when we built our virtual school, we took our small-school values and we took our brick-and-mortar pillars to our virtual school.* *"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."* *"I do explain to them you don't know that about yourself until you try a few different options."*
Lewisville ISD Dr. Chris Bigenho, Director of Virtual Learning Academy	"*Completion is where the funding comes from. So if that student were to not be successful there or were to have to change schedules[...] that creates a problem for us, a funding issue, because now they weren't there for the attendance, right? Attendance is all or nothing."* *"These are students who are looking for full-time online... Gymnasts who are level nine and ten. They are at a level where they're competing nationally, trying to get into the Olympics. We had a cyclist who was an international cyclist and traveling all over the world. How does this student take courses? And we were not able to offer them full-time online in the traditional sense we chose to do that and allow that to happen. We lose money on that. But nonetheless, it was the right thing to do for the kids."* *"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."*
Great Hearts Online (Texas) Kurtis Indorf, Chief Innovation Officer Michelle Mendelhall, Educator Emily Sullivan, Headmaster	*Kurtis Indorf:* *"Earlier today, you heard someone testify about how the [ways virtual learning builds] relationships of students from across the State of Texas was a surprising and beautiful thing. Our kids are in each other's homes, getting to know each other in places and communities and cultures that otherwise they would never have met. When I think about strengthening the social fabric of our country, strengthening the social fabric of Texas, it's a beautiful thing to behold."* *"The first question is why do you want to build an online school? To say to have one is not a sufficient answer. You really have to have a point of view on the problem you're trying to solve."* *"There are lots of families that wanted to be more involved, to integrate*

Raquel Zapata, Parent/Director of Academy Operations, Raquel Zapata	*home life and school life into one cohesive whole. And so instead of thinking about parents as something that you have to deal with, we embraced families and parents and the grown-ups in their lives. And we pulled them in closer."* *Michelle Mendenhall:* *"Teaching online has been a blast. I absolutely love waiting every time I sign in for my music class. I see scholars lined up in that waiting room, anticipating what we'llsing that day, and as soon as they join, their energy is just amazing."* *Emily Sullivan:* *"I stand before you today as a school leader. I have the wonderful opportunity to work with three different groups of people every day. I work with parents every day who want and need a public school option and choice that works for their families. I work with students who want and need an optimal learning environment, an experience that matches their learning styles and needs. And I work with teachers every day that get to hone in on their craft and add the title innovator to their long list of titles. At Great Hearts, across all of our schools, we talk all the time about our deep belief in a public classical liberal arts education for all students. Great Hearts Online opens that access to families all across a great state. And that is an incredible opportunity for them."* *Raquel Zapata:* *"A question that might have come up earlier in the session is whether online was a good model for our younger kids. And I'm here to say, 'es, it is.' I am living proof. In my family, three of my four boys have IEPs. They all received different services for different reasons and it's been extremely wonderful for them. If anything, we feel that the services they've been receiving have really helped them, and the ability for them to stay at home and for my family to help with their education has been a tremendous growth opportunity."*
Dallas ISD Dr. Michael Hinojosa, Superintendent Susana Cordova, Deputy Superintendent Dr. Olga Romero, Principal, Dallas Hybrid Prep	*Dr. Hinjosa* *"We like to have best-fit schools for our students. We also stood up a pandemic virtual school, and by definition, that was not for the future. That was an intervention strategy. At one point we had over a thousand students. We're now back to under 500, I believe, because that was just a strategy to deal with this pandemic and for the students and families that did not feel safe. We didn't want to lose them to a home school, charter school, or no school. We wanted to have a solution for them."* *Susana Cordova:* *"We actually have increased the number of choice options that we have for our families, because we know in a city like Dallas serving over 142,000 students, there's not one single school that's going to meet the*

	needs of every single one of our students. We do know that choice is something that is very appealing to many of our families, including the choice to attend a neighborhood school. And the concept of a hybrid school and a virtual school, as you just heard, is an option that we feel is important for a very small but important group of our students, students who may not ever want to come to full-time school in person, who really can benefit from the opportunities for a school like our hybrid school." *Dr. Olga Romero:* *"Our building is designed as a hybrid space. A hybrid space means that our children have the space and the capacity. And even we push them to be collaborative, to be able to move around our building. We strongly believe that our building has to replicate our model of learning, so you will see collaborative spaces."* *"[For] 100% of our parents, the feedback that they gave us was, 'We need an alternative.' For private online learning, they wanted to come back to public school to the point that ten of our families are actually recaptured families from home school and private school environments, which is a big win for us."*
Texas Tech University Dr. Justin Louder, AVP Academic Innovation Cari Moye, Principal, TTU K-12 Online Dr. Lisa S. Leach, Senior Director of Instructional Design and Curriculum Development	*Dr. Justin Louder:* *"Because we're associated with Texas Tech University, we have access to all of the resources that a Tier-One research institution has, including instructional design, support, research experts in education, curriculum, online learning, and student development. And so we leverage all of the partnerships that we can within the university to make sure that our courses are provided to our students at the highest point possible and with the most use of appropriate online pedagogy and instruction. As others have talked about, the emergency remote [instruction] is not the same as pedagogically-sound online programs."* *Dr. Lisa Leach:* *"We have been recognized in the U.S. Best Online Schools several times, most recently this past year. We have a COGNIA accreditation which used to be advanced and it's fairly difficult to achieve and it basically just accredits high-quality online programs. We are a Purple Star School, which means that we're military family-friendly. And that's one of our populations of students that we are very proud to serve as they have to move. They have some continuity because they can remain within our program, whether they're in the U.S. or anywhere that they happen to be stationed overseas."* *Cari Moye:* *"Last night, as we were getting ready for this presentation and talking about some of our students and our student body, [one story] came to mind... [a student] whose parent called us in desperation: my child is*

	nineteen. He hasn't graduated. He's been in the midst of a dark addiction, and this is our last hope. We're begging, we're hoping that this works. And he was able to graduate."
April 27, 2022	
TN AP for All Zachary Adams, Director of Postsecondary Coordination & Alignment, TN DOE	*"The commissioner really sees this as an opportunity to expand access in rural and economically distressed counties. And we've seen that bear out in enrollment, which I'll share more about later. But there are there were many schools who came into this program, not having offered AP before because they didn't have the staff to be able to teach the class or the course didn't fit into the master schedule because it was a smaller district and they had to focus on sort of the core graduation requirements. And then finally there wasn't enough student interest in the course. And the beauty with AP access for all is we can take three students from one district to students from another and so on until they build a course section."*
Village High School (Colorado) Nathan Gorsch, Founding Principal	*"We believe the real power of online learning is personalization, the opportunity to create different pathways for students and allow them. And we'll unpack how we do that in our school. We think schools could have high expectations and a nurturing environment. We think many schools pick one or the other, not intentionally. It usually is either picked for them or they unintentionally pick it. We think that we have high expectations for all of our students, but we match that with high levels of support. In a nurturing environment, school is not always the most important thing in a student's life."* *"...Big picture, schools needs to change. More and more of our students are disenfranchised, disconnected, and disengaged. And so what we want to do is create a more thoughtful model that really plugs them into their experience. So how does it work? So we would pose ourselves as a modern high school. So we do. We try to combine the best of in-person and online. So we use online coursework for our core classes because that's where we believe we need the most personalization. So math, science, English, social studies are done in an online system and then electives are done in person."* *"We made a very conscious decision to lease content because I think that when we talk about teachers, there are two very specific skill sets that teachers need to have. One is curriculum development and the other is relationships and communication with kids. The assumption is that most teachers have both. The reality is that not all teachers have both. And if they do have both, we all fight over them. So what we said is actually, let's take that curriculum development piece off their plates and let's free up their time and their skills to build relationships with students. They're still involved with curriculum. They still oversee it, but they don't have to*

	start from scratch."
ASU Prep Digital (Arizona) Julie Young, Managing Director Lisa Edgar, Chief Partnership Officer	*Julie Young:* *"One of the things I want to make sure is super important to mention is we did not start for the virtual school to be a stopgap. We didn't start for a virtual school to be an alternative school. We didn't start it to be an, 'if you can't have this, then this is the next best thing.' The team that we built started toward a virtual school to be a best-in-class educational experience for any and all students that we served. And at no point did we take a posture or did we think that because we were teaching students in a virtual space that their education would be substandard. In fact, quite the opposite. The design of the program and the design of issue prep digital currently was personalized before personalized was cool."* *"We not only set out to create this incredible place for kids to be themselves, and as I always said, every student should have a front-row seat with a teacher all their own. We set out to design a place for teachers to really be in a position to love their work. And we had many, many teachers. One of the things that there are all kinds of myths that go with virtual education, which we use and I'll talk a little bit about today, but one of them was that we were going to take jobs away from our schools and our public educators. And in fact, it was quite the opposite. We created new career paths and new job opportunities for teachers. And we had many teachers who came to us and said, 'I was going to retire,' or, 'I was going to leave the profession, but I now have an opportunity to do something new and different and feel a little bit like I have [...] a new career path while maintaining an opportunity to teach.'"* *"Another myth [about virtual education] was that it would only be for high achievers, and we actually had conversations about testing kids on the way in the door. What we soon learned is that students found themselves oftentimes in a virtual classroom. They no longer had peer pressure. They had a teacher at their beck and call. They could work at a schedule that was conducive to their brain, to their body clock, to their family circumstance. Kids were not dropping out to go to work to support their families because now all of a sudden, they could manage both. And some of our students, some of our very best students, were students that when they were in their traditional classrooms, just based on getting behind and the peer pressure at hand did not see themselves as learners and soon discovered that they were a learner and had the opportunity for their academic growth to really, really take off."* *"We talk about just being flexible and making sure that you can give schools and programs the opportunity to kind of design those learning experiences that are specific to local needs... We really go into a school district and say, hey, how can we help? What does this look like in your*

	district? What do you need? Because every district and many schools within a district have different needs based on their population. So designing a funding circumstance that allows for that flexibility is highly desirable." *"Some states have designed systems that are so rigid that if you miss this small window to get a course approved, or if you need to change a lesson because somebody decides the planet doesn't exist and you're outside of that window, that you have to wait a full year in order to get that course approved. So we don't recommend that, but we do recommend that there is a quality vetting process at the state level of providers that has enough flexibility for ongoing improvement within the courses."* *Lisa Edgar:* *"Our teachers are certified, Arizona state certified, highly qualified. And then wherever we serve in any state, they have to be certified within that state. We do a very intentional onboarding and we have a large professional development. So our teachers all go through a very specific employee orientation and then we do have a blended learning credential, hybrid learning, or online learning credential that we offer."* *"A lot of school districts are now creating their own online programs. And we're helping to empower that with the curriculum and quite a bit of virtual teacher training and teaching school districts how to not just do teacher training, but as Julie said before, what does it look like to be a virtual principal and what does that online leadership look like creating an online school culture, etc., as a big piece part of what we're doing [...] A big part of this is training these people to be able to serve a digital student well... Our recommendations will also speak heavily and underscore the importance of professional development and how different an online education educator is. You know, not every brick-and-mortar teacher is also a great digital teacher, and vice versa. And so really honing in on the craft and skill... but pedagogically what do you do to become a successful and engaging online teacher or online leader or online guidance counselor."* *"Keeping students engaged, especially these new learners and the new generation of learners, requires an engaging experience that has kids discovering and clicking and moving and not just facing the screen and reading."* *"The ability for the student to slow down in science and be remediated by their science teacher... that [personalized] flexibility allows for them to stop and remediate. And then the adaptive courses that we're serving them up will give them enough to be faced with more remediations and lessons. So it's really the ability that you're not sitting in a classroom [that*

	ends] when a bell rings. They can slow down in that course and take 20 weeks instead of 16 in science, then do reading in 10 weeks or they can really adjust based on where they're accelerating or needing to really slow down."
Florida Virtual School Dr. Louis Algaze, President/CEO	*"Teachers [who work on] our content and our platforms — they are trained by [us. It's], important that teachers who are in this modality receive proper professional development. Otherwise, you end up with what the Senator mentioned earlier, really bad results. So when you have good, good content, good platforms, good teachers that are taught to do this right, you have very good results."* *"We doubled in size pretty much over the pandemic because we were already there. And they could benefit from our experience. And our kids, like I said, they did well. So it's asynchronous. The kids do it at their own pace. That's the rolling enrollments. If you think of a kid who failed a class, they may have failed the class, but then they didn't learn anything. So when they take that class again, they can learn at their own rate. 'Oh, I remember this. I can move through it more quickly. This, I don't know. I need more help. I can pick up the phone and call the teacher or text them, which is what kids like to do more nowadays. That I need some help.' The teachers have live lessons with kids. For those lessons, [where they see kids struggling the most, they have individual sessions with the kids, so it is very personalized to the needs of the students.]"* *"Teachers agree that teaching online allows for better one-on-one connections...one of the consistent things that they told me was it's really shocking to them because a lot of them obviously came from [the] brick-and-mortar world."*
State of Utah Senator Howard Stephenson	*"This year we provided legislation so that small rural school kids can get the same calculus course quality as a kid in a large urban school — because these schools can't attract a calculus teacher or a physics teacher or a chemistry teacher. And yet these kids, regardless of their zip code, can get just as good instruction as kids at a large urban school. These [virtual] courses are all aligned to Utah state standards."* *"Utah became the state to have the first statewide digital teaching and learning master plan, which basically brought together all of these other previous pieces of legislation and created a task force of educators and some legislators... This has done more to unify our educators in the use of computer-assisted instruction and online learning than anything we've done."*
June 29, 2022	
Texas Education Agency	*"When we think in both of these model contexts about the value and opportunity with virtual, I think they're endless, especially for our small*

Alexis Bauserman, Director of College, Career, and Military Preparation	*and rural schools. The opportunity to expand credit opportunities by thinking creatively about how students can engage with higher ed. Sometimes being distant from a community college partner can make that challenging, but having the opportunity to engage virtually can really open the doors for this particular model. And then similarly, I think we've gotten much more creative about what work-based learning can look like in a virtual context. And so how can we ensure that students are able to just, no matter how distant they are from an industry partner or how distant they are from a higher ed partner, truly be able to engage in those opportunities? Flexibility in scheduling is particularly important in both of these contexts where I'm trying to merge a college schedule and a high school schedule, or trying to overlay the sort of daily operations of industry with the daily operations of K-12 is one of the key focal points of those partnerships at the onset when these partners are developing an MOU and setting their school design that is at the forefront — the scheduling piece and the need for flexibility in that scheduling."* *"It is interesting to think about the primary location of a student when they're engaging in extensive work-based learning. Perhaps the primary location is on a job site. And to be able to engage in some of the core academics elsewhere (virtually) is certainly... something to explore... Some of our P-TECH models are approaching more of that model where they're thinking very differently about their academic schedule so that there is concentrated time for work-based learning and then also concentrated time for academics. So a deeper dive into some of those preliminary P-TECH models to see what is possible in terms of flexible scheduling and then how the virtual opportunities might be deepened."*
TX 2036 John Hryhorchuk, Senior Vice President of Policy and Advocacy	*"Virtual learning is a tool that can be used to help solve for some big problems that face our education system. First off, virtual learning can really help solve for some equity challenges in our school system, particularly some rural equity access issues. It can help supplement existing learning opportunities, improving access to coursework that is more rigorous in communities that don't currently have access. It can help provide us with better-aligned workforce systems where there currently may not be economies of scale or there might not. The class calendar that aligns with workforce needs. And last, it can help us address labor challenges."* *"We see in the data there's a disconnect between once that child or a student graduates from high school and goes out into life after that, there's a drop-off. Life gets in the way for many students. We can see this in the gaps between certain regions of our state that have incredible, incredible K-12 performance and then low postsecondary achievement for their populations. Life gets in the way. Well, the more we can push that into high school, the better. [...] And there are some trends emerging in terms of micro-credentials and short-term credentials [...] that offer those*

	career-focused students a chance to at much-reduced cost and obtain a workforce credential, a value that I know our state is looking at very closely. I think that is an area ripe for further expansion." *"I think that there's a massive gap between good online learning and bad online learning. I think that's something everyone's ready to acknowledge. There are the things that have been proven in terms of models, whether it's through the Blended Learning or Khan Academy or all these other self-paced or competency-based models that are incredibly engaging for students and incredibly impactful."* *"If you're able to have the really high-quality trained online instructor beaming in [who] is the expert on the topic to students scattered about the state who are sitting in a library or in a special classroom that's for their needs. You can leverage that massive investment we made in online learning and meet those kids' skills and education needs."* *"These are online operable courses that can be embedded into high schools. And it's not just tech jobs. It's not just everyone going off and coding. There are workforce credentials that can be embedded that leave students in as good of an economic place as they would be with a more advanced post-secondary education."*
Permian Strategic Partnership Molly Young, Director of Education Initiatives Tracy Bentley, President/CEO Superintendent Dr. Scott Muri, Ector County ISD	*Tracy Bentley* *"We truly believe that this is a once-in-a-generation opportunity that's brought us together for a common purpose, and that is to strengthen the communities where we live and work. At PSP, we believe that it should be a partnership between the state and the private sector and working together and combining resources. That's where we're going to start to see outcomes that are transformative, and then they're really moving the needle. Our goal is to make the Permian Basin a destination for education, health care, and workforce training, not just somewhere where you go to work for a couple of years and do your time and then get transferred. We want to be an edge destination for those areas."* *Molly Young* *"We are on a mission [...] to bring all of the available resources that we can to the Permian. And that means thinking outside of the box. And we believe that virtual connectivity is going to be one of those solutions."* *"We put our thinking caps on and we really looked deeply at the data one more time and we had an 'aha moment.' Almost none of our school districts are offering full-scale, fully sequenced energy programs of study to their students. And we are an organization led by 17 oil and gas companies. So it only makes sense to us to dig deeper into the energy sector. And that's what we are going to do. We are going to build a turnkey opportunity for students to go through a full-scale [program], fully*

	aligned to the TEAs program of study in energy. And we're going to work with our districts to bring them all of the resources that they need to make that happen so that they're not doing the heavy lifting." *"We also piloted what we call a 'flipped internship' over the summer in one of our rural districts in New Mexico, where we are bringing the industry to the students instead of sending them out on a rig or to do the work in the field, which comes with all sorts of IP and liability issues that is proving to be very successful. And we've had subject-matter experts come to them from all over the world with companies like Chevron and Occidental and Pioneer and our other member companies. And then, of course, you can't get students engaged in anything unless there is some sort of marketing outreach technology hook for them. And so we are bringing in some very bright minds to help us figure out how we attract students and their parents. We want parents to understand the great opportunities that are available."* *Dr. Scott Muri* *"What the PSP does is they provide an opportunity for our teachers to have one-on-one coaching. It's like going to the gym and walking into this huge gym on your own and not knowing what to do with the equipment. Our teachers have a personal trainer and those personal trainers are virtual trainers. And so one way we leverage virtual national board teachers from all over the country is they provide one-on-one coaching to our teachers that are seeking their board certification, and that is because of a partnership with them with the Permian Strategic Partnership — they empower us to support our teachers as they navigate that process."* *"The next challenge we had is connectivity, and we had this prior to the pandemic. But the pandemic certainly made this a reality for us and very visible. So we discovered quickly that 39% of our students either didn't have internet access in their homes or had marginal internet access. So a real crisis opportunity for us. And so we leveraged some of our art money or our federal dollars to purchase tools and equipment for teachers and for students. We appreciate that partnership with the state and the federal government, but the issue was more than just devices for kids. We had people — families that lived in rural parts of our community that never had access to high-speed broadband, and it wasn't because they didn't have the money. It simply didn't exist. And lo and behold, the Permian Strategic Partnership, there are oil companies that have rigs, oil rigs all over the Permian Basin that they need to have Internet access to send their signals and their data back to headquarters. And so together, we solved the problem."* *"The research says that when a kid has a one-on-one tutor, they learn that actually, they can outperform a teacher or a student that has a great*

	teacher in a classroom. So that one-on-one tutor can be significant in the life of a child. So we went searching for those folks, and they don't exist in my community. I needed thousands of them, but I would have taken hundreds or maybe even 50, but I couldn't find any. But our kids deserve them. And so we sought virtual tutors. We partnered with a variety of different companies. And today I have over 6,000 students in our school district that, because of virtual learning and virtual technologies, have their own private one-on-one virtual tutor. And we do that as a part of our academic day."
Rural School Innovation Zone Steve VanMatre, Superintendent Premont ISD	*"What we found out was that through collaboration, through partnerships, through sharing resources, we can make things better for everybody."* *"There are wonderful things outside of the classroom that they need exposure to. So we place [that student] on that [college] campus. And then we also have wi-fi on all of our buses. So subsequently, the hour that [student] goes to Corpus Christi and the hour they come back, they're taking a class, which works for us."* *"We've also found that we're able to coordinate most of our professional development through virtual, where there's a major efficiency of operations when we can hire one PD person for three districts versus each district hiring three."* *"Last year my valedictorian not only received his associate's degree, but he also received his CCR in welding and learned how to turn a ranch and build stuff. Now he has a woodworking business. He's using his God-given cognitive skills and what he has learned from his education."*
State of North Dakota Kristen Baesler, State School Superintendent	*"We have what we call 'choice-ready graduates.' There was an honesty gap in North Dakota. We had really high graduation rates and when we measured what we valued, either military-ready, college-ready, or work-ready, we found that a very low percentage of those students that received a diploma from us in North Dakota were actually 'choice ready' and really prepared for whatever they chose to do after high school... If you have 100 kids graduating, 100 kids should be choice-ready."* *" [Our virtual schools] are held accountable under the same metrics, but they also receive full funding... Whether or not they are enrolled in that district's virtual academy or brick-and-mortar high school building."*
CareerWise Colorado Ryan Gensler,, Sr. Director of National	*"I appreciate and applaud Texas' approach to studying and expanding virtual learning. It's a critically relevant tool, particularly in what we've learned over the past several years through the pandemic. But also, you know, this isn't just a valuable tool because of the pandemic. This is a valuable tool because of access and choice and options and opportunities for young people [interested in apprenticeships]."*

Partnerships	
Aldine ISD Diana Delpilar, , Principal, Avalos P-TECH Early College High School	*“We can move away from a one-size-fits-all approach, whether it's a one-size-fits-all in traditional face-to-face instruction or a one-size-fits-all virtual, and move towards more flexibility in how students engage the learning. What we learned was that students can engage when they have the right level of support and the right learning environment.”* *“Having this flexibility [to choose an online environment] definitely impacts learning and for students who have social anxiety, have to work, have difficult economic situations at home, or have any other reason to which engaging in person is a challenge... It gives them an opportunity to have the learning experience that is a better fit and better match for them.”*
City of Fort Worth Maddie Parker, Mayor	*“I thought it was important as you think about the intersection here today [between] virtual education [and workforce] because we believe... how critically important the virtual education piece will be, the long-term success of some of these models to really reach students differently... paying close attention to job creation, understanding the importance to include business leaders into this model... you understand the importance already of changing the funding model. Right now our schools are faced with ‘your student has to have a butt in their seat to draw down funds.’ We have to change that because all these businesses... are begging for more time with students, but school districts are confined with how much time they can really offer to an employer. I think that's something that this virtual education commission can help us address.”* *“I appreciated Representative King... for that 2013 piece of legislation to get us to this place already. I think right now the state of Texas has... the opportunity to expand that and think bigger. This world has changed tremendously since that bill was passed in 2013, and there's so much innovation and opportunity in education specific to virtual education.”*
Forney ISD Dr. Justin Terry, Superintendent	*“It's for every kid. We're about 4,500 students right now in our high school program. [...] We really focus on innovating inside the box. And so we take some really creative measures to get to that point, and a lot of it's through partnerships.”* *“We actually put kids in our central office, and we let them explore which career they’d like to go into and then let our staff be the teachers, whether it's a mechanic in our bus barn or whether it is a digital graphics person creating logos in our communications department. We pay those kids — it's during the day, and they're all throughout our school district based on their interest. But again, it takes time and it takes flexibility.[...] It can't be done without virtual education and the flexibility that it could provide for time and schedules and all those components.”*

Richardson ISD Sari McCoy, Executive Director of Career & Technical Education	*"We really believe that current technology education is a pre-K through 12 opportunity. And what I mean by that is that when I'm in elementary school, if I can have the opportunity to explore careers that I didn't even know exist. I can be inspired to learn and discover more and to really figure out who I am. Then that gives us as educators an opportunity to partner with the families, with the counselors, with the teachers, and really give students the ability to kind of direct their path at that early age."*
July 27, 2022	
Texas Education Agency Megha Kansra, Associate Commissioner of District Planning and Supports Jessica McLoughlin, Director of Educator Standards, Testing, and Preparation	*Megha Kansra* *"There was recent action by the SBEC (State Board for Educator Certification) to implement [virtual instruction in educator prep programs]... And essentially that action was to add virtual instruction and virtual learning to the set of topics that educator prep programs must include in their curriculum. This goes into effect September 1, 2022."* *"An observation here might be that there's quite a bit of variation in the instructional methods here, and that at this moment of time, there isn't necessarily a single, coherent, clear sense of how to support teachers in developing capacity in this area effectively."* *Jessica McLoughlin* *"The current SBEC rules that go into effect as of September 1 include a requirement for training on virtual instruction and virtual learning in the curriculum. The SBEC doesn't specify, particularly, where that's integrated within the curriculum and really allows preparation programs to make informed decisions based on their instructional context. So there may be some programs that have a specific course or specific unit focus on virtual instruction. There may be other programs that integrate components of virtual instruction throughout their methods [and] courses throughout the course of their curriculum."*
Texas Tech University Dr. Heather Greenhalgh-Spencer, Associate Dean	*"A lot of parents had an online schooling experience that was deeply negative. They had just bad teaching because bad teaching can happen in any modality. But the thing is, because that was their only experience with online education, they now have in their head, 'Online education is bad,' rather than, 'That was a bad version of online education.' And that's unfortunate because the data actually would contradict that story. The data would say that online education, when done well, can work for all grade levels elementary, secondary, even in preschool."* *"One of the problems we found out [during the pandemic] is that teachers, when they were suddenly thrown online, had a really hard time because many of them could not even imagine what it looks like to be a teacher online. So having [teacher candidates] be a student online,*

	learning how to be a teacher online is even just one step in the right direction. That doesn't have to be their whole career. That doesn't have to be their whole teacher training. But again, understanding what good online teaching looks like is helpful from just your sense of understanding what you might need to do when you are a teacher in an online space or even just using technology." *"Online has affordances that the bricks-and-mortar space does not have. You can do more things like, 'Let's share a jam board. Let's look at Pear Deck. In the later grades, let's use VoiceThread to be able to really interact with each other and learn from each other.' Teachers can use those tools to create an environment that is actually more engaging than your traditional teacher at the front of the room...there are actually more ways to engage in the online space."* *"We know this from research, not just in the online space, but across the space. The more teacher candidates are actually in the classroom... the more they can actually practice the skills that they need. That's the job-embedded part. The literature is clear on this. The more job-embedded you can make your training or your professional growth, the more you move that needle, the more you actually see a change in practice from the teachers."* *" The nice thing about the online modality, if they're leveraging it well, it really allows children to be able to get instruction where they are at. So you have some kids, especially in those early grade levels, where some kids really blossom very, very quickly. And so they're already at a much higher lexical level than some other kid in the same grade level. So being able to leverage the capacity of online spaces to meet this student where they're at is actually a tool that teachers in a brick-and-mortar classroom, unless they're using blended, often don't have at their disposal. And so in that way, [virtual learning] actually is addressing those primary students in the literacy content area in a way that that really does get at their needs in a way that the traditional [in-person] educational model doesn't."*
Digital Learning Annual Conference Allison Powell, Director	*"What we saw during the pandemic, teachers went into this without any preparation. ome had a weekend, some had spring break and got an extra week of training to do this. But they tried to replicate what they were doing in the face-to-face classroom and online environment. And it totally is a different type of pedagogy, communication, the way you're interacting with students, meeting with them, and just to put kids in front of a Zoom session for eight hours a day doesn't work."* *"We're getting better over the last 20 years, but 73% of teachers that are new to online learning have at least six years of classroom teaching experience. 22% of them get hired to teach online, get no training, or they get less than 10 hours."*

	"What we found across the country is that the teachers want ongoing training sessions. They don't want to get it all at once... They like workshops and they want them to be online... I think it's important that they experience an online environment before they teach in one because they're getting that empathy of how frustrating things can be, and so they can change their classes and empathize with their students after having gone through an online course." *"I don't want you to forget about the administrators. The teachers are important, but the administrators don't usually get any training for this, and it is a different environment. And we so they're coming in from the brick-and-mortar school. They know how to evaluate face-to-face teachers, but they probably haven't taught in this environment. They haven't gotten any training. So don't forget about the admin too."*
Texas Classroom Teachers Association Holly Eaton, , Director of Professional Development and Advocacy	*"Any kind of state-level professional development program for teachers should not be a mandate, especially given the recent experience with the reading academies. The perception in the field is really important right now to what is coming at them. So I would encourage that there not be a mandate. One of the foundational aspects of a high-quality professional development system is one in which teachers as professionals self-select the professional development they determined to be of most value...rather than mandating, incentivizing teachers to participate in the professional development is the preferred approach."* *"You've heard that there needs to be dedicated instructional staff solely for virtual... so no requirement for teachers to teach in person and virtually at the same time... the decision to provide virtual instruction should be voluntary on the part of the teacher."* *"[For teacher training,] it's more about the competency than the hours."*
Association of Texas Professional Educators- Andrea Chevalier, Lobbyist	*"Any consideration for additional training, for additional technology in the classroom — we also need to think about what roles might that be adding to the teacher, what additional constraints might that be placing on their time, And how can we provide for release time stipends just valuing their time as professionals."* *"In terms of professional development, I think we have a really good opportunity to again explore the micro-credential route."* *"I know that the training that y'all are contemplating... you're not thinking of it as being a required training, and we completely appreciate that. So lessons that we can learn from the reading academies is that teachers would love to be paid for their time engaging in those... So really want to make sure that we're respecting teachers' time, having a voluntary*

	training, and having adequate release time to be able to effectively learn that content and also in the modality of the training."
Texas State Teachers Association Carrie Griffith, Government Relations and Policy Specialist	*"I think there's potential for really high-quality hybrid opportunities to come out of this commission. Hybrid learning. Sometimes it's used interchangeably with blended, but our understanding of hybrid learning is that the student is an on and off technology but is in and out of brick-and-mortar. So it's a modality of teaching that presents the components of teaching and learning and a flexible structure that permits students to engage in learning in traditional classrooms as well as remotely. So central to hybrid is that it's characterized by flexible attendance models. And we believe that were this commission to recommend funding public schools on enrollment instead of attendance... this would really open the door to incredible opportunities afforded by technology, but also in the best interest of students."* *"Preparation really needs to get to the heart of the core elements of what a student needs in order to learn, especially when they're in... a virtual environment."* *"I think that we need to guard against virtual learning becoming sort of the modern-day in-school suspension, sort of to put a kid online would be a really cheap way to kick them out of the classroom."*
Panel: Texas Virtual Educators Summer Reel, Virtual School Program Administrator, Guthrie Common School District Natasha Rodriguez Perez, Dallas Hybrid Prep, Dallas ISD Beth Sauer, Great Hearts Online Bethany Weston, K-8 Virtual Academy, Denton ISD	*Summer Reel:* *"I will tell you that our data shows over the past 10 years with our organization, the most successful students in school districts are the ones that have a great facilitator. You can call them a coach. They can be in the school, they can be in the home, they can be someone assigned. It helps because when the children decide to get up, to come off the radar and they do that as many stakeholders as we have in the game, that increases our success rate tremendously."* *"One of the biggest challenges is hiring quality educators to move out to the outer ring of civilization and teach. So I feel like that's some of the best work we've done in our virtual organization is because I believe my team of teachers is the best of the best and now they are accessible to students in the very little, tiny districts around us that we serve. But they're also accessible to the larger urban school districts who buy our courses. I think that the concept behind the Texas Virtual School Network was, 'Let's have the best of the best, create and teach, and let's put it in a format that is accessible to anyone who needs to leverage that resource.'"* *Natasha Rodriguez Perez:* *"We have some preferences when we work and we perform better in different environments. So our kids do the same. And in our school in*

Lindsey Yost, Texas Tech K-12	*Dallas Hybrid Prep, I realized that some students need a less restrictive model based on their preferences or their needs. [...] So virtual learning is the type of model for all the students that need this independence, this flexibility, this self-paced [environment] and maybe [...] sometimes they need this extra motivation. [...] And when you give this choice and voice to the students, they perform on a high level. And our data is behind this information. This agency provides them the ownership of their learning, and the power of the decision of their academic goals. And when they have choice, they perform better.* *Beth Sauer:* *"I think it's just important to emphasize that we can't make assumptions about a certain type of student being able to do well successfully. Literally, every single one of my students was in a different situation. They each had somebody different at home with them, helping facilitate their learning every single day. And I think that the diversity of our student population really spoke to the need for continued online access for students in Texas."* *Bethany Weston:* *"The way that we are housed at the Generalized Virtual Academy, we are sharing teacher space with one or two other teachers. So I was right next door to my counterpart. We have headsets to kind of block out the extra noise, but we are still able to naturally observe and participate in one another's classrooms. In a brick-and-mortar classroom, there's literally a wall there. We are not able to step away from our own classroom and observe each other, and the amount that we were able to learn just from that casual observation in our conversations after class, because we would, you know, give a lesson, and then we would sign off the kids and then we would talk. How do you think that went? How did that go for your kids? Well, this is what happened in my class. And here's what I think we should do next time. And so we went through that cycle three or four times every single day with every class. And I just hadn't had the opportunity of actually getting to work with another teacher and receive that sort of live feedback before. And it really helped me progress professionally in a lot of ways."* *Lindsey Yost:* *"I'm not creating curriculum, okay? And that means I'm able to just really teach and work with those kids directly on those skills. And I'm not stressed in any other part of me trying to make a lesson plan. And I have the map laid out. I know what I know, where we need to go, and what we need to do to get there."*
Educate Texas	*" I think you've heard a lot of good information from a lot of people that are far more expert than me on a lot of the details about what makes a*

Ryan Franklin, Senior Director, Policy & Advocacy	*good online teacher professional development. I want to kind of echo that. The need to match the program requirements and any requirements you would place on teachers. I would urge the Commission to match that to what you're setting up. As far as the funding model and the structure in place, the needs for a full-time virtual setting will differ greatly from a blended or hybrid model, and so really match those professional development requirements to the model that you all move forward with or models that you move forward with. I think it is about a range of options, and I was really struck by the notion of low-, mid- and high-touch. And I think those will vary greatly depending on what you're doing."* *"I would urge the committee to be leery of specifying a number of hours [of professional learning] and would urge to look at more competency-based models wherein teachers could demonstrate competency. I would say that the total number of training hours required for a new teacher, for all things that a new teacher has to earn and learn is 300 hours. And so if you're thinking about 45 to master this piece, that's a pretty big chunk of the overall portion you might be layering on, especially on pre-service teachers."*
iTeach- Diann Huber, Founder	*"I believe it is incumbent on everyone not to take for granted what happened during COVID, but to learn from [it] and that's why I so appreciate what this committee is going to do to look at the individual, personal, collective circumstances and let's change and prepare for the future. We have an opportunity to learn from COVID."* *"We found that whether [classroom observations] be asynchronous or synchronous, it was so beneficial for the teacher to be able to review. They didn't know that they missed a student misbehaving. But we could also identify at 5.3 minutes into your instruction, you stopped and acknowledged a shy little girl. We could also look and see that it was less disruptive to have a virtual observation. When you have an older individual go into a kindergarten room and sit in the back of the room, the children are preoccupied with, 'Who is that person? What are they doing? Are they going to visit with me?' In the virtual observation, that tendency is removed."*
Engage2Learn Chris Everett, COO Kammi Green, Chief of Partner Success	*Chris Everett:* *"We want to take the opportunity to really commend the Commission for digging into this. This has been an unprecedented time in our industry, but in our opinion, it's the ultimate opportunity to really think through how we support educators as a whole."* *"I have a real heart for teacher preparation in one context, but also teacher retention as a district-level leader, turning over hundreds of teachers a year, trying to find a way to keep them. It comes down to — and the data is pretty clear about this — them feeling supported to grow*

	in their professional capacity. So that's our opportunity honestly to begin to develop a modernized system of professional learning and support for educators that will you'll see trickle down to students as well." *"So whatever we put into place, we would encourage you to have a way to measure the impact of the efforts that are going to happen, whatever those are. We hope that it's evidence-based. We hope that it's differentiated in a very real, relevant, meaningful way and then work to create a tipping point. We operate under the law of diffusion of innovation theory, where if you can get to a tipping point, you can gain a lot of momentum and see real change systemically. So that's 16 to 20% of the teaching population."* *Kammi Green:* *"Our approach to professional learning is a job in that it individualized coaching support that's based on evidence of practice versus observation because we want to elevate the role of the educator so that they can own their own professional learning."* *"We have a three-pronged approach to professional learning that is competency-based standards, evidence-based coaching, and individualized pathways. This approach is really a more modern and efficient professional development approach because it models what we want the classroom to look like and not be a one size fits [all] approach. What you will see up here is an example of our virtual learning competencies, and with this professional development approach, an educator selects their entry point and the goal that they want to reach. They're then able to use our online platform and the aligned resources to help them start at their entry point and get to their goal, which is really that personalized, individualized pathway. And they show evidence of practices aligned to those competencies in their actual classrooms or on their campus if they're a principal. We are then able to measure that growth in the competencies, and educators are actually able to earn badges aligned to those competencies. This is how we are able to connect educator growth to that student achievement, student performance, and educator retention."*
Texas Computer Education Association- Jennifer Bergland, Director of Governmental Relations	*Jennifer Bergland:* *"In [TEA's] long-range plan for technology, it recommends school districts adjust, address the shift that must take place to accommodate this new reality. It is a shift in how we teach and learn because now every student has one of these devices and they have access to so much information and so much capability that it changes the way a teacher has to approach what they're doing inside the classroom. And that's one of the reasons why I mentioned this, to point out that all teachers need these skills, regardless of if they will teach full-time or a part-time, or even if they will see their students face to face every day, because they will be*

Lori Gracey, Executive Director	*shifting occasionally to asynchronous learning when they're using their learning management system."* *Lori Gracey:* *"I will tell you the story of my son, Steven, who is a band director [in], a district near here. And when he was told he was going virtual, his little district had no help for him whatsoever other than, 'Here are the tools you're going to use.' How do you [do] band virtually? So he got involved with some other teachers because teachers are amazing people who can do the most amazing things on a daily basis. And he found out that, yes, you can teach band virtually and students can be engaged. And he had a really, really good year that year with his band students. They had all kinds of awards. Everything was great. So we want to keep that going for these teachers — the ability to really do what students need, and I know that's what you all are looking at."* *"I would strongly recommend that if you are able to provide professional development for teachers for virtual learning, and you should, that it be self-paced, that it be micro credentialed, whether it ends up on their certificate or not. If not, we'll live with it because sometimes that can carry on aspects a lot of different requirements, right? That, if possible, you find some money to pay them for their time. They're used to working for free, quite frankly, but they shouldn't have to always, and y'all all know that and that you really work, as others have said, to provide training to the administrators and the other people who are going to support them, including their school boards, because there are many school board members who are not fully aware of all of the pieces of what needs to be in place for this."*
Quality Matters Christine Voelker, Director, K12 Program	*"We also know that teachers are discouraged and unsure about the promise of virtual learning after their experiences during the pandemic. There are many barriers to a successful virtual program, including courses that are thrown together, sometimes quickly and without proper training in design and delivery. Not enough opportunities to engage, to learn how to engage students, to teach effectively in this type of environment. A lack of incentives for those who could become mentors and leaders of digital learning. Support from the community is often lacking. Often, schools and districts don't have a plan for reflecting and evaluating their practices to continuously improve. And lastly, the integration of a plan for quality assurance. These are barriers that we see schools and districts all over the country having to overcome. Luckily, there are solutions. So what works? What can we do to overcome the barrier of poorly designed courses? Because there are a lot out there. We know that participating in official course reviews has possible positive implications for both students and teachers. This not only helps to strengthen the design of not only the course that goes through the review process but the feedback can then be applied to all the courses."*

	"How are you going to recognize and compensate these teachers and administrators for becoming experts and mentors? This is a big commitment and we want to acknowledge that. And the acknowledgment doesn't have to be monetary, an extra planning period if we can accommodate that. A mentor title recognition is important because it boosts morale, it increases productivity, and it builds positive relationships. Praising employees for their achievements reinforces quality performance, benefiting both the staff and the organization. Teachers proudly post their digital credentials. We award in their signature lines and their email signature lines. It could be as simple as that."
August 23, 2022	
Elevation School Cherry Creek (Colorado) Kristy Hart, Principal J'Lee Brown, Student Ray Reiswrig, Student	*Kristy Hart* *"We tend to see a percentage-wise higher population of students who we would consider twice exceptional, or students who have affective needs programming, students with social-emotional learning needs on the IEP that have IEP services. [...] The great part about that is that we can provide a lot of systems and structures and supports in a setting like ours that really meets these needs of students."* *"There are all sorts of different models and ways that this can work for students. But the most important piece is that we're looking for a way to support the students who are enrolled in our district. And how are we looking at that community need and establishing a program that meets those needs? So this is just our model because this is what our community needed."* *"We are a blended school. Our students are in the building at least one day a week and then they do have virtual support as well. We have live virtual classes two days a week and our students actually sit there in Zoom like this. And the teacher is doing direct instruction and community-building and opportunities for deeper depth of engagement and learning in those live virtual classes. We also have virtual instructional support, which is basically like a help session during our office hours, five days a week, and then those 'brick days.' So students, at any point, all five days of the week, do have the opportunity for live synchronous support, either virtually or inperson with their teachers. Obviously, with a high amount of flexibility, there has to be a high amount of support in order for students to demonstrate success. And so those brick days are a huge part of that where those students do come in the building."* *"We are in a quarter-grading system which allows for students to move in and out of our system with relative ease and with a higher degree of*

	credit acquisition at the high school level, when students have to wait till the end of a semester, and if they aren't successful, then they've lost an entire semester of learning and it puts them behind." *"The great thing about our space is actually also when we don't have students in the building. I mentioned our students are only here two days a week. And so oftentimes when students are not in the building, the district is utilizing this space for other purposes."* *J'Lee Brown* *"I was enrolled in a public school setting originally in elementary school. However, it wasn't a fit for me. I needed more one-on-one help. I needed more time to really focus on my studies and not just on social engagement. And even though homeschooling was a great fit, it gave me more time and flexibility. I wanted to have more."* *Ray Reiswrig* *"I'm a senior now, and Elevation is a perfect fit for my family because we choose to travel a lot. And I also want the flexibility to be able to take internships. I work during the day. Sometimes I need to be looking for colleges. and this school gives me the flexibility to get my work done and still do all those other things that are crucial for my future. I can do school at home, on the road, at my friend's houses, wherever I feel like it is the best place for me to be."*
The Learning Accelerator (TLA) Dr. Beth Rabbitt, CEO	*"The research is quite clear. [...] It's not technology. It is, in fact, the quality of the experience that learners have. The way in which we're designing that experience. In fact, there tends to be no difference in different models tested. It's really about the choices educators are making with students to realize a vision for effective learning, regardless of where it happens."* *"Students have more access to more resources and experiences than ever before, whether that be from the classroom to their school system to potentially state-level experiences. And a lot of experience happened outside of our formal public learning, such as individual tutoring and teams they're working with and communities they're learning with. We think the challenge for policymakers and practitioners in this moment is figuring out how K-12 can in fact leverage all of these resources to overcome challenges of equity that we've been experiencing for a long time and figure out how we leverage them in ways that are coherent and actually advance our systems."* *"Coming out of the pandemic, what we noted is a lot of folks were looking at virtual learning as purely a tactical and intermittent strategy for learning. [...] Our models for learning continuity are absolutely essential, particularly given the climate facing environmental disruptions, student*

	illness, potential future health challenges we might be facing as communities. We have to get good at learning continuity. But that actually isn't where we should be focusing most of our energy. In fact, we should be thinking about hybrid learning and virtual learning as strategic use of new tools and new models that actually produce opportunities to work in new ways to drive new outcomes that we haven't been able to achieve within traditional structures." *"I want to talk a little bit about some levers that we're seeing from states that we are working with that we think are particularly important to highlight. The first is to focus on quality, equitable student learning, not the inputs of learning. I think the pandemic forced many of us to turn to monitoring inputs in a moment of crisis. We looked at instructional minutes and how much of that was asynchronous versus synchronous, and we tried to control that. And that actually had nothing to do with what we really want, which is mastery of learning and high-quality experiences coming out. The second thing is the creation of common-line infrastructure and interoperability. States are in a unique position to actually aggregate demand and create alignment across a lot of disparate systems to ensure equitable access and experiences. And then finally, leveraging economies that the state might have that others don't — to actually network and study efforts to make the work better over time."*
Texas Education Agency, Special Populations Dr. Justin Porter, Associate Commissioner, Special Populations Programs and Policy	*"The opportunity in virtual environments for parents and caregivers to be more involved in the actual classroom, experience what's happening and potentially have increased modeling of strategies in different ways to support children who have specific needs and opportunities for increased communication with parents. And then definitely we heard this across the board... the potential for increased comfort levels for some students with autism and other disabilities who may have some sensory sensitivities and social anxieties. One of the things that we're hearing specifically with kids with autism and disabilities that are in that realm are hybrid programs supporting those kids so that they can continue to work on their social skills and things like that in an in-person situation."* *"[For a continuum of services,] the school district has to provide everything a kid could possibly need, that has to be accessible through a school district... The federal law that requires that online platforms have to be accessible to anybody with a disability... There's just a lot that goes into being compliant with that federal law."*
Trinity Charter Schools Keely Reynolds, Superintendent	*Keely Reynolds* *"Right now there's anywhere from 35,000 to 40,000 children across Texas that are considered in state care. Roughly 40% of foster care children fail to graduate from high school. [...] On average, one in three foster care children will have switched schools at least five times by their*

Andrew Benscoter, Chief Education & Growth Officer Sonja Cornejo, Principal	*junior year. What I want you guys to do is just imagine for a second what it would be like to be a child in care, which is at no fault of their own, enrolled and withdrawn in over 13 different schools with huge gaps in their education. They've never passed a STARR test, left to deal with childhood trauma all while dealing with these moves they have no say so in. Imagine the daily internal struggles with confidence or feeling seen and heard. The constant stress and anxiety from getting to know their new caregivers. Trust issues and all the other obstacles that they face when it comes to trying to blend in with other students [...] Not to mention the struggles of just being a kid these days. Now, imagine all of what I just mentioned while trying to make it to the finish line and get their high school diploma."* *"School stability is a necessary component to improving the educational experience and outcomes of students in care. Research highlights a link between school stability and improved graduation rates. [...] Foster youth who had fewer placement changes per year were almost twice as likely to graduate from high school. It is widely recognized that school mobility contributes negatively to education outcomes and has adverse effects on students in general. So our goal is to increase awareness about the complexities and challenges that impact students in care. While we can't control DPS placements or how long a child's length of stay is, or where they go, what we do have control over is advocating on their behalf to make crucial changes in education law that will benefit them for the better, which is why we're here before you today."* *Sonja Cornejo* *"When I talk about our virtual schooling, we have a hybrid learning model. Predominantly, our kids receive their education in our virtual program, strictly virtually. 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. So 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."* *Andrew Benscoter* *"The need is very high and there's a great opportunity that this commission has. This body has to make recommendations and really impact these kids. And so you may ask, well, what's the model we look like? Well, we want to open a virtual learning [program] or expand our current virtual learning [offering]. But [as] I said, also add in community partnerships, add in vocational work, and add in credentials with community partnerships. We've already started advocating from different groups that we could partner with if and when the Legislature makes some changes."*

TeleTeachers Emily Smith, CEO	*“We don't just put kids in front of Zoom and expect them to learn. We have to really lead with whole-school approaches to implementation where we're educating schools, teachers, families on what this means and why we're doing it.”* *“We have to think outside the box and individualize these programs for each student. So particularly for some of the students with visual impairments, we did utilize U.S. mail to mail them devices, and our teacher was working a lot and teaching Braille and she would make things and send them to the students home or send them to the district.”* *“You take away barriers to getting there or to finding that provider, and you can do some really amazing things for students. We saw a decrease in secondary students avoiding going to therapy or additional supportive environments because it was less stigmatizing. And our students are living in a digital world. Students with visual impairments, you know, we think of virtual education. We think they cannot be served. There's no way. But they are living in a digital world and we have to find a way to enable them to use assistive technology or to use tools and support to be able to access that digital curriculum.”* *“Last year, Colorado produced funding of $9 million for every youth in the state to have a mental health screening and three free therapy sessions. It was unheard of and groundbreaking, and when we partnered with them, we were able to take the technology that was being used to deliver virtual learning in the school environment, simplify it, and produce a platform that enabled these services. So now at the state level, youth everywhere are able to log in for a screening, go through a mental health screening, and get onboarded to a provider.”*
Presence and Andrews ISD Kate Eberly Walker, CEO Presence Trina Falcon, Director of Special Education, Andrews ISD	*Kate Eberle Walker* *“I think the reason we have over 2000 therapists who work with us is that, you know, when they experience burnout in the school environment, they come to us as a way to continue serving these children, but with the remote work flexibility that they want.”* *“One of the nice things about teletherapy is that it can allow you to match students with like needs and have them be interacting with each other and practicing and developing skills together as well as with the therapist.”* *“We tend to be most used in areas that are serving underserved populations. So a disproportionate number of our districts that we work with have a high proportion of low-income families, they have a high proportion of racially diverse students, and they are disproportionately in rural areas.”*

	“So why teletherapy? We've talked a lot today that we need teletherapy because there are severe shortages. Therapists are highly specialized and they just can't be everywhere at once. Therapy is a way to stretch them further. And, you know, if you have someone with a particular skill set, whether that be bilingual skill, experience, working with assistive devices, experience working with particular elements of autism, these are areas where you can take that one expert and you can have them reach a broader group of students and spend more of their time with those students.” *“The power of teletherapy is it can go beyond just, maintaining services or solving for shortages. It can actually help maintain relationships for students. We also find [that] because there's technology involved, that technology can support with paperwork, with monitoring caseload sizes, with tracking IEP meetings and time spent on meetings. It can actually free up therapists to spend more of their time on therapy and less of their time certainly on driving and navigating logistics between sessions, but also on some of these other more administrative, administrative areas of the work. And so that also we think contributes to not only efficiency but happiness, satisfaction. And to me, it's just all about retaining these therapists in their work.”* *Trina Falcon* *“Our counselors with teacher shortages are overwhelmed and many times [...] are actually covering classes because we don't have enough teachers to be in front of our students. [...] We have talked a lot about the importance of mental health after the Uvalde tragedy, and before that. And I think that as a commission we have a tremendous opportunity to present this and provide more funding so that our students have access to these services all across Texas. I'm really excited about this because I think that this is a great way for our students to have access to services that they badly need.”*
InnovateEDU/ Educating All Learners Alliance Erin Mote, Executive Director	“*What we've learned post-COVID-19, is that school systems that were already started in personalizing instruction and providing virtual instruction or education to educators and upskilling educators did far better in education recovery than those traditional systems who did not make those investments, were not invested in education technology, and had not already focused on blended learning models.”* *“The frame I want you to take today as I'm speaking is this frame that's available in universal design for learning, which is about ‘shoveling the ramp rather than shoveling the stairs.’ When we design systems that are the most inclusive system possible, we shovel the ramp in a snowstorm rather than just shoveling the stairs, [so that] all students can have access to these opportunities.”*

	“Ensuring that there's a multi-tiered system of supports in place is also incredibly important and necessary so that when a student might fall behind in a virtual education environment, that there are some folks who are there in order to intervene.”
University of New Mexico Dr. Mary Rice, Assistant Professor of Literacy	*“Families enjoy online learning environments when they have access to support and they've got information about how to share those roles and responsibilities for schools. So lots of times what is happening is that there's not clarity around who is supposed to do what. So if we have log-in troubles, who are we supposed to contact? If the assignment doesn't get done, how am I going to find out about it? Who is going to make sure that the assignment gets made up? So is the school going to come up with something or does the parent have to sit by the child and make sure that that gets done? And so the greater clarity around that, the better.”* *“Our synchronous time is generally perceived as useful, but not all families who have children with all types of disabilities prefer the synchronous. So for example, some children with emotional behavioral issues prefer the asynchronous structure because they may not be in a mental state to approach the curriculum except for like what might be a weird hour to us, like two in the morning, ten at night, and so. So that's the first myth. The second is teachers and students with disabilities are doomed to these low-quality interactions in online learning. And people have talked about this pretty much all day long that actually many teachers report that they know more about the students and that they feel like they have stronger relationships with them.”* *“I have found one of the very first projects I did was I looked at 50 teachers, 50 virtual teachers in six different states, and some of those teachers came from Texas. And nearly all those teachers had a near attrition narrative where they almost quit. And then they were like, ‘Oh, let me try teaching at a virtual school.’ And it kept them in teaching.”* *“Myth number four: Accessibility is difficult or cumbersome to achieve in online learning environments. And in reality, accessibility actually it's becoming cheaper and easier over time. So Microsoft Office, Google Products as well now have all built-in features for captioning. Just turn them on and go and actually they will do different languages... Users can also adjust image size, font sizes, font types, colors, and more products than ever before. “* *“I know we've talked about least restrictive environment... in terms of the child learning in a setting with peers to the greatest extent possible. What that used to always mean is an in-person setting. But the notion of general education as being situated not in an in-person setting, but really where the peers are with and without disabilities is shifting. And so as the*

	general education population takes up online digital learning more, then that's the new, least restrictive environment. Whereas previously online learning was regarded as a highly restrictive environment. *"Texas sits in this great place of really amazing opportunity to build on what other people have been able to do so far in terms of really opening up online learning to the greatest number of students possible."*
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Del Valle ISD Dr. Annette Tielle, Superintendent Dr. Carlin-Gonzalez, Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum Dr. Sonja Howard, Director Mishima Hansen, Director of Bilingual Programs	*Dr. Tielle* *"There are research best practices. I don't know that there is a one-stop shop for those best practices, but there certainly could be an area where best practices are located for teachers. It could be in a professional development portal, for example."* *Dr. Carlin-Gonzalez* *"Through a virtual model we were also able to develop virtual professional learning. And so in 2020 [...] we launched a 100% virtual professional learning academy. [...] This was all synchronous, which means that was live instruction from our curriculum coordinators, our instructional coaches or teacher leaders, whoever was teaching the particular sessions. This was tailored for virtual instruction and delivered virtually for our teachers."* *"There are six strategies that we hold firm to and we expect to see in every classroom, and that doesn't waver in a virtual instruction classroom [...] There some examples of how teachers might be able to obtain some of the things like frequent feedback and frequent talk [in an in-person classroom], but in a virtual setting, using things like Flip Grid, breakout rooms, hand signals, polls, and Google classroom, those kinds of things, [we can] still meet those instructional strategies. And we trained them on that during our professional learning for teachers. Again, our model isn't changing. Our expectation isn't changing when we go to the virtual model. We're just helping them tailor their instruction to be able to deliver it in a virtual manner."* ***"**When students started struggling a little bit [...] in virtual instruction, our principals invited those students to in-person tutoring with the teacher throughout different times of the day, one-on-one. Once they were able to get back to where they needed to be, then they stopped coming in for those in-person meetings, but [...] teacher office hours [were] offered to any student who needed that."*
Humble ISD	*"After doing this for a few years, we really hope that this commission will fund all students. And it's really important to all of our students to have a quality educational experience. And we recognize that although we will*

Dr. Elizabeth Fagan, Superintendent	*do everything we can to make sure every student is successful, sometimes students aren't successful. That happens in person and that happens virtually. But we still provide the staff, the materials, all of those things, and do everything we can do to make that student successful. And so we believe that it makes sense to fund every single student who is enrolled in Humble ISD and receives that quality education."* *"And I think an important side note to this conversation is in fast-growing districts, we do our very best to pass bonds and build facilities just in time, not too soon, not too late. Virtual seats actually sort of create a little bit of flexibility for us in offering our families alternatives or for learning that doesn't require actual brick-and-mortar seats and actually attract some families who probably wouldn't be enrolling in Humble ISD at all, maybe homeschooling or other things without this option. So we're very happy to have them as part of our district."* *"We've basically given teachers the choice to be a virtual teacher or not. Some teachers love it and thrive in it and are actually much more successful as virtual teachers than they might have been [in-person] classroom teachers. One example is a teacher who doesn't really excel in classroom management but is an expert in their content, and loves to teach it. They have far fewer management issues, obviously, with a virtual class of students. So in a teacher shortage area that we're all in, it's wonderful to be able to provide differentiated opportunities for teachers based on their strengths, their skills, and their interests. So not only do we want to provide a personalized experience for students, but we also want to provide a personalized experience for our staff because we want to attract and retain the best and maximize their strengths in allowing students to come and go from campus."* *"Our Summer Prep High School class of 2022 valedictorian was 100% virtual since March 6 of 2020 and is currently a student at Rice University. So we're very proud of her. And she's another example where Humble ISD has learned that while it may be a very small percentage of our students, virtual learning is the answer for some students. And that's why we have continued to put the resources, the time, and the space behind this work."* *"I have a few neighboring districts that are] smaller than we are, and it could really benefit their students if we were able to open our empty seats to their students who might have an interest in a particular class [...] that we're already offering. And again, it creates greater economies of scale for all of us, but currently, it would just be too cumbersome to make that work."*
Public Testimony	*"My daughter, Bella Garza was enrolled in LSOA. And she's been enrolled there ever since the pandemic started. As a parent, I asked for the virtual*

Anabel Garza, Parent	*educational option at LSOA because she has a current lung condition that placing her in a public school setting creates a high risk level for her health. So throughout her first week [of this school year], because of the recent misrepresentation with SB 15, she's been attending an actual brick-and-mortar school. [...] She's been placed under a lot of stress. Personally receiving a letter 20 days prior to her first day of school and having a job that requires a lot of travel and taking care of the household, it has placed an enormous amount of stress on me as well."* *"She didn't meet the requirements; she had to pass her math and science examinations which she only missed by ten points. And I go back to how she was having all these difficulties in and out of the hospital during the situation."*
Public Testimony Melissa Barbee, Parent	*"I'm just a parent and advocate for my daughter. But it seems like funding is being put in places where students may already be excelling better. And I feel like maybe there should be more focus on those that need more help, because that's the reason why I pulled her out of the brick-and-mortar. We went through so much trouble trying to get the support we needed because I knew something was wrong with the way she was learning in the public school system in person. And I wasn't getting anywhere. I was talking to the faculty. I wasn't getting anywhere with that. So then when virtual came along and I was able to work with her and help her pace herself and give her more control, it built her confidence. And then, you know, the news that she couldn't go back, it was devastating."*
Public Testimony Laura Stegner, Parent	*"As a parent advocate and a mom of daughters who has learned with public online learning for 12 years, I strongly believe in a parent's right to choose the best public school option for their child, be it brick and mortar or be it a virtual school."* *"I wanted to talk to you today about what happened at Lone Star in mid-July. In mid-July, a few weeks ago, 1300 families who had made the best choice for their student were sent a letter saying that their students were not eligible for re-enrollment in the upcoming 2023 school year because their student had fallen into one of three prohibitive categories [...] I put to you today that what was done to the families at Lone Star in mid-July was not fair. And it certainly wasn't fun for those two girls back there who were told they couldn't come back to their school. And the other families that I've talked to since then, many families and we ask that you would look into this and please, please prevent this from happening again."*
Public Testimony Ricelso Bavo,	*"I'm not just a parent. I'm actually a partner in their education because they're at home and they're online. This relationship has really allowed my boys and so many other kids to excel in the growth in ways that we*

Parent	*parents pray for but we rarely get to see."* *"Despite my kids' disabilities, they have to be perfect to return to the school of choice. The school that is right for them."*