

Date:	March 25, 2021
Subject:	Virtual and Hybrid School Accelerator Application Process
Category:	Strong Start 21-22
Next Steps:	Attend informational webinars and submit application

The Texas Education Agency (TEA) is excited to announce the application process for Texas local education agencies (LEAs) to join the 2021-2022 Virtual and Hybrid School Accelerator (VHSA).

Virtual and Hybrid School Accelerator Overview

In the wake of COVID-19, LEAs across Texas have reimagined schools, upending traditional thinking about how school “should” operate. No school was required to offer remote instruction this year, and while we don’t know what changes the legislature will make, it is unlikely that any school will be required to offer remote instruction next year. For the overwhelming majority of students, the best place to learn is in the classroom, and we encourage school systems to support more families returning to learning in the classroom as quickly as possible.

That being said, when designed effectively, virtual or hybrid learning can be transformative for students and educators, opening new opportunities for personalization, data-driven instruction, and “anytime, anywhere” learning. While virtual and hybrid learning environments may not be the right choice for all students, some families and students have also thrived in these environments and would like to see such options continue into the coming school year and beyond.

LEAs interested in designing and launching a full-time virtual or hybrid school in SY21-22 are invited to join the Virtual and Hybrid School Accelerator. Participating LEAs will receive customized technical assistance to design, implement, and continuously improve their virtual or hybrid school model. These supports include, but are not limited to, model design, strategic staffing, academic strategy, family engagement, supporting diverse learners, developing teachers, and other topics related to virtual and hybrid school programs.

NOTE: The Texas legislature is currently determining whether and in what manner to allow for continued virtual/hybrid learning in SY2021-22 and beyond; thus, the passage of statute or an extension of the emergency rule framework is uncertain at this time. However, TEA suggests that LEAs plan for any virtual/hybrid school options that will meet the needs you are hearing from your students, families, teachers, and other stakeholders. TEA also recommends staying up to date with ongoing legislative actions on relevant bills that have been introduced during the current legislative session. This way, if such options are approved, LEAs will have a plan ready to activate.

Finally, if legislative decisions result in virtual/hybrid learning not being viable in the coming school year, TEA will discontinue this program.

Eligible Applicants

All Texas LEAs that commit to a virtual or hybrid school program are eligible to apply to join the Virtual and Hybrid School Accelerator (VHSA) Program. This includes both:

- Individual LEAs establishing a virtual or hybrid program, and

- "Consortiums" of multiple LEAs that are committed to standing up a single virtual program to serve their collective student populations. A consortium of multiple LEAs should apply to this program as a single applicant with a single application
 - The consortium option may especially be a fit for smaller LEAs looking to pool resources into a common virtual school and/or LEAs with a small number of expected remote learners in the coming school year and beyond
 - A consortium could also function such that one or more LEAs is / are contracting with and sending their remote learners to a virtual program operated by a different LEA

Eligible applicants could be considering a virtual or hybrid school program, as defined below:

- **Virtual School Program** – one virtual school set up to support all remote learners in the LEA; other students attend school on campus
- **Hybrid School Program** – hybrid grade(s) or school(s) with learners who are on campus part of the day or week and remote for the rest of the day or week

What Districts Participating in VHSA Will Receive / Benefits

The VHSA will select up to 50 applicants (with a single consortium of multiple LEAs counting as a single applicant) to support in late spring 2021 through summer 2022. Selected LEAs will be matched with highly qualified technical assistance providers. Those providers, in partnership with TEA, will support LEAs to reimagine their virtual and hybrid school delivery in alignment with the Effective Schools Framework in the following ways:

- Accelerated school model design support for a high quality virtual or hybrid school program, including but not limited to:
 - Designing a dynamic and highly effective student learning experience
 - Building aligned staffing models
 - Crafting a strong school culture and family engagement strategy
- Virtual or hybrid school launch and continuous improvement support, including but not limited to:
 - Ongoing training and development of teachers and leaders
 - Implementing proactive and responsive student support services
 - Analyzing data to ensure that all students can access high-quality, grade-level instruction
- Understanding of emerging best practices and providing opportunities to directly network and learn from other LEAs doing similar virtual or hybrid school programs
- Providing a direct line to TEA support and resources

Through this program, TEA will support LEAs in continuously improving their virtual and hybrid schools through SY21-22. Due to the highly fluid nature of the school year, TEA reserves the right to modify the program or supports.

Selected LEAs must commit to making the VHSA a cabinet-level priority. A full-time cabinet member must make this a yearlong priority and be willing to make significant improvements throughout the year.

Selection Process

TEA will select LEAs based upon the strength of their applications and interviews, objective measures of need, and evidence of willingness of the LEAs to implement significant improvements during the school year.

Virtual and Hybrid School Accelerator Program Application Process and Timeline

Due to the highly fluid nature of the school year and pending legislature guidance, TEA reserves the right to modify the following deadlines and information.

Date	Event
March 25	Applications Release: The application will be available on the Strong Start Resources webpage. Consortiums of LEAs should submit only one application that includes all participating LEAs’ information.
April 8, 13, 15, 19	Information Webinars: Interested LEAs may learn more by registering for and attending a webinar. Thursday, April 8th 11:00 AM Tuesday, April 13th 9:00 AM Thursday, April 15th 2:00 PM Monday, April 19th 10:00 AM
April 23	Application Due: All LEAs must submit completed applications to rssp@tea.texas.gov . These will be processed on a rolling basis until the application deadline.
April 5 – May 7	Zoom Interviews: TEA staff will conduct 25-minute Zoom interviews with LEA cabinet leaders to add context to the written application and make an acceptance decision. The designated Virtual or Hybrid School Program Lead and either the Superintendent, Chief Innovation Officer, or Chief Academic Officer are required to attend. Other cabinet and senior leadership members who will be involved in the virtual or hybrid school program are invited to attend but are optional. Consortiums of LEAs are required to have each participating LEA’s Lead and either the Superintendent, Chief Innovation Officer, or Chief Academic Officer attend. LEAs will receive an invitation to interview upon submission of their applications.
May 14-21	Acceptance: Accepted applicants will be invited to join the program. Technical Assistance Partner Match: Accepted LEAs will be matched with their technical assistance partner for the program.

May 25 and May 27	Cohort Launch: All accepted LEAs will participate in a cohort launch webinar.
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Please email rssp@tea.texas.gov with any questions regarding the program.