



Curriculum Questions and Answers

Q. What is the difference between Virtual, In-Person/Remote, and Blended Learning?

A: If you want to discuss an issue involving a student's learning with a school official, it will help if the official understands the context of the student's learning situation. Some people use the terms virtual and remote interchangeably, but for educators there are critical differences.

Virtual learning is the program for students who are learning from home full-time. Most of their instruction typically comes from a computer-based online curriculum, but they have assigned teachers from their school who monitor their progress and provide supplemental instruction to enhance the online curriculum and regular online meetings to support social interaction and continued connection to school culture. Our high schools were offering virtual classes before the pandemic, so many of these classes are based more on teacher created content because they have had several years to build up tried and tested virtual lessons. This is the first year that virtual learning has been an option for K-8 students, and those teachers serve more students than an in-person teacher, so they have to rely more on the online curriculum content.

In-Person/Remote learning is how most students in Hoover are being served this year. When students are able to attend school in-person, this is much like normal school with precautions and restrictions in place to prevent the spread of the virus. We have different levels of restrictions, and at levels 3 and 4, in-person is replaced by remote learning either on an alternating basis (Level 3 Stagger) or every day (Level 4 Full Remote). Remote learning is different from virtual learning in that the lessons are coming from the in-person teacher instead of an online curriculum product. The teacher can assign work in various online curriculum resources, but the teaching and overall lesson design is coming primarily from an individual teacher instead of an external curriculum. A remote lesson should include both a video lesson, either live or recorded, and a

related assignment or activity. An assignment or activity without accompanying instruction from the teacher is not the best form of remote learning. This is the most common source of complaints about remote learning, and this is somewhat understandable given the fact that many teachers have had to learn entirely new skills this year to make recorded video instruction easily available. However, teachers are given time to create these lessons and can get assistance from instructional technology coaches whenever needed.

Blended learning is an option for middle and high school students only, and it involves a student spending part of the day at home learning virtually and part of the day at school in an in-person/remote learning setting. Blended learning is not an option for elementary students. It is an option for students who need to be on campus for specific classes such as an art program, sports, or career technical programs, but they want to minimize opportunities for potential infection for the rest of their school day.

Q: Did the school district provide training and establish standard expectations for virtual and remote learning?

A: Yes and yes. All teachers received training in our Brick to Click Instructional Framework at the beginning of the school year. Expectations were established for both virtual and remote learning conditions, and teachers received training depending on the context they would be assigned to for the 2020-21 school year. Virtual teachers tend to be more consistent with each other because they are mostly relying on a common external online curriculum, but in-person teachers will have more variety in their remote lessons. In-person teachers are following a district scope and sequence of content, but we have always allowed teachers a lot of freedom in how they design individual lessons for their students. However, when we knew that we were going to move back into a level 3 stagger schedule on November 30, we shared a Brick to Click refresher with all teachers that included some specific new directives for remote learning that were based on lessons learned from our time in the staggered schedule during 1st nine-weeks:

1. Students must receive five (5) days of instruction per week that includes two (2) days of in-person instruction at school and three (3) days of remote lessons to be completed at home.

2. Remote lessons must include teaching and assignments, not just assignments. This means that students should receive at least three (3) video lessons from their teacher to accompany three different assignments or activities per week.

3. Since Wednesdays are remote learning days for all students on a staggered schedule, teachers will use that time to plan remote lessons and record videos, hold posted office hours on Google Meet for students or parents, and provide individual or small group tutorial assistance to students who need help. Schools should minimize meetings, training, and other activities on Wednesdays. Instruction has the highest priority.

Fortunately, we have been able to avoid level 4 (full remote instruction every day for all in-person students) so far this year. However, we have had students who have been sent home on quarantine, and those students are temporarily considered to be at level 4. As such, these students should receive five (5) days of remote lessons per week. In quarantine situations, teachers may use more recordings of live lessons instead of individually prepared recordings in remote lessons, and the teachers should have at least some communication with their quarantined learners, either through email, telephone, or online Google Meet, on a daily basis. The teacher's Google Classroom should be the primary place for students on quarantine and their parents to find teacher videos, assignments, class calendars, and other information about that particular class.

Q: What should I do if my student is struggling with virtual or remote learning and is not getting the help he or she needs?

A: First, share your concern with the student's teacher. You can contact the teacher through email or by visiting online during the teacher's Google Meet office hours. Teacher contact information should always be available in their Google Classroom, and your student should know how to get there online. If the student has special needs and is assigned to a case manager in the school, it is helpful to make the case manager aware of your concerns as well. If you are not satisfied with the teacher's response, call the school and ask to speak with an administrator or counselor. School officials appreciate the opportunity to resolve problems before they are reported to the central office. If you are still not satisfied, please call the central office, 205-439-1000, and ask to speak with someone in the Curriculum department.

Q: How will the instructional disruptions caused by the pandemic affect state report cards for our district and schools?

A: Because state and federal end of year testing was waived at the end of the 2019-20 school year, there will be no published state report cards for 2020. Officially, the 2019 report cards will be extended to represent both 2019 and 2020. As of today, state and federal tests have not been waived for 2020-21, so we expect to give those tests at the end of this year. If that happens, then report cards for 2021 will be published by the state sometime next fall (usually in November). With a new federal secretary of education taking over soon, that could change, especially if we see a large Covid surge across the country in February when hospitalizations from the Christmas period are expected to peak. But for now, tests are expected to be given, and the report cards are scheduled to be published. As far as we know, there will be no adjustments or changes to the criteria based on the unusual circumstances of the past year.

Q: It is January. Are we on pace for where students should be at this time of year?

A: We assessed students in reading and math at the beginning of the school year in grades K - 10th and we compared those results with the fall of 2019 to see whether students had lost ground due to the remote learning that was in place last spring. We found that students had not lost ground in reading, but they had lost some ground in mathematics. We are in the process now of assessing students at the mid-year point, and that assessment will conclude on January 28. It will take a couple of weeks to unpack the data, but soon thereafter we should have a sense of whether further ground has been lost, and if so, in what particular skill areas and grade levels.

Q: How will we close learning gaps created by the pandemic?

A: This is the topic of discussion among our school leaders whenever we have a few minutes to pause from the daily battles required to keep our schools open. We have funds to begin tutoring soon for K-3 students who are behind in reading, and we will host a K-2 literacy intervention camp this summer. We are still working on ideas and seeking funding sources for mathematics.

But all of these things face implementation challenges while we are still restricted by social distancing and cleaning protocols. There is a new round of federal funds on the way, but we don't know what the priorities and strings will be at this time. Our first priority right now is to provide the best instruction we can every day to keep those gaps as small as we possibly can. We have a big job ahead of us when the pandemic curve finally starts to turn in our favor.

Q: Will the ACT be given on our high school campuses?

A: Yes. Dr. Murphy approved both Hoover High School and Spain Park High School to be open as ACT testing centers starting in January.