Virtual Academy Family Handbook
(updated 2022)

The Virtual Academy was established in 2021 as a response to COVID-19. The district wanted to provide a virtual learning environment for families who were not comfortable attending school in an in-person setting. Students can take courses from any Internet-connected computer, available 24-hours a day, seven days a week. The virtual Academy's mission is to offer students access to high quality courses, and interactive online learning that is neither time nor place dependent.

Profile of a Successful Online Student & Family

Students take online courses for a variety of reasons. For some students, it expands the range of courses and opportunities, particularly if a student cannot access an in-person course due to scheduling conflicts. For others, it allows students to take courses not offered at the local level. Other students may use online course opportunities for credit recovery or as a viable homebound option. And, still others may simply prefer the online learning format. From a student's point of view, online learning may be attractive because it is:

- Personalized to individual needs and learning goals.
- Flexible so a student can try different ways to learn.
- Interactive and engaging because students will be meeting people from other school districts in a safe, monitored environment.
- Relevant to the online life many students lead.
- Paced by individual progress so students can move as fast or as slow as needed in order to attain learning goals.
- Collaborative with faculty, peers, and others.
- Responsive and supportive when a student needs extra help or time to learn.
- Available to all students 24 hours a day.

The most important question to answer is whether or not the student is well suited to be in an online learning environment. Parents and students should be aware that the demands of online courses are equal to or exceed those of traditional 'face to face' courses. Online instruction places much more responsibility on the student. A student should plan to spend at least one hour a day, five days a week, on each course. In other words, at least five hours per week on each course. This is similar to the amount of time a student would spend in a course at the local "brick and mortar" school. Instructors with online teaching experience agree that students who are successful at online learning have the following critical characteristics:

- **Good Time Management:** Can the student create and maintain a study schedule throughout the semester without the in-person interaction with a teacher?
- **Effective Communication:** Can the student ask for help, make contact with other students and/or instructors online and describe any problem he/she is having with the learning materials using email?
- **Independent Study Habits:** Can the student study and complete assignments without direct supervision and Maintain the self discipline necessary to stick to a schedule?
- **Self-Motivation:** Does the student have a strong desire to learn skills, acquire knowledge and fulfill assignments in online courses because of their educational goals?
- **Academic Readiness:** Does the student have the basic reading, writing, math and computer literacy skills to succeed in an online course?
- **Technologically Prepared:** Does the student know how to open, create and/or save a document, use various technology tools and identify file formats (e.g., doc, xls, pdf, jpg)?

Families of online students can help foster a supportive learning environment in the following ways:

- **Communicating With Your Student:**
    - Know their upcoming deadlines--short term and long term

- Check on specific classes each day of the week to avoid just asking about "school" in a vague way that gets you vague answers like "it's good"
- Ask to see progress on assignments as they go instead of at the deadline
- Trust your student, but contact instructors (in whatever way they list on their syllabus) if progress or expectations seem inconsistent with learning in the course
- Help your student decide what's considered successful for each of their classes. Help them compare what they have completed to:
  - The assignment instructions
  - The rubric or standard for grading
  - Any examples provided

- **Communicating with Instructors**
  - Be in contact with instructors early in the course
  - Tell instructors about circumstances unique to you and your student that impact their learning
  - When starting a conversation, remember that instructors are currently doing more than ever before just to create something close to normal education.
    - There won't always be clear and simple answers to the complicated questions that will occur as we collectively evolve to meet the challenges.
    - Please keep your ideas and suggestions practical, broadly applicable to the class, and focused on what can be done.
  - Ask about units and activities that have traditionally presented challenge
  - Circumstances of school and learning are now new to everyone and staff, students, and parents are collectively looking for the best way forward. Everyone will need to be a bit more adaptable and communicative than in the past, and embracing that together will bring more success than viewing it as the responsibility of just instructors or just students. This will take all of us.
  - Activities and assessments may not look the same as they used to. We'll all need to be open minded about the ways students can learn and express that learning.

- **Active Awareness of Course Expectations**
  - View the syllabus to know the goals and philosophy of the course. "To learn biology" is a superficial answer when all of your student's instructors have personal connections to their content. Know what those are so you can offer more support than "do your algebra" as the semester goes forward.
  - Look back at past work with your student
  - Look at their score and instructor feedback--are they reaching and holding a standard that you consider a success in your house or do changes need to be made?

- **Supporting Student Needs for Time and Environment**
  - Foster healthy, productive sleeping patterns. Check-in during the day to encourage active, involved participation during school hours on remote days
  - After school schedules may need a second look
    - Help them adapt according to the realistic needs of your home
  - Help them make environments where they can focus at home. Look for:
    - Locations with limited interruptions--preferably not just their bedroom
    - Timeframes that let them focus for long enough to complete a task
    - Materials for assignments to be ready before starting
  - Help them pick out the specific activities before beginning work at home. They will have more success if they know:
    - What task are they working on
    - What is considered "complete"
    - Where to look for supports if they get stuck
  - If internet access is a concern, be in contact with the district about supports that are available to ensure your student has access to all of their needs from home

The Stanford Research Institute examined the accessibility of online learning for students, especially those who were at risk of failure. Their report cautions that students who have failed in-person classes may have challenges that will affect their success in an online course as well. Many students do not realize that they will have to be even more accountable for their time, performance and productivity in an online class.

Making the Decision to Enroll in the Virtual Academy

In this process, a crucial role of the parent is to help the student decide if online learning is the most effective way for him/her to learn. Using the profile in the previous section is a starting point for making this determination. Once a parent decides if a student is likely to be successful, there are other questions to consider:

- **Technology**
  - What are the technical requirements for the courses the student wants/needs to take?
  - Can the parent/guardian provide the internet access that the student needs? ➔ How technologically savvy are the parents/students?
- **Learning Environment**
  - Is there a quiet area in the home in which the student can work on the online course or does the student have easy access to a facility that provides this form of environment (such as the public library)?
  - Will there be a regular, designated time of day in which the student will work on the course(s)?
  - Is the student willing and able to ask for help when needed?
- **Considering the Course**
  - Does the course meet academic/graduation requirements?
  - Are there prerequisites for the online courses? Has the student met these requirements?
  - Does the course meet NCAA Eligibility Requirements for potential Division I and II student athletes?
  - How rigid are the course assignment/test dates?
  - What is the time commitment (daily and length of term)?
  - How do students/parents receive grade updates and the final grades? ➔ When can a student drop the course if he/she finds it too difficult?

Enrollment & Scheduling Procedures

Families must request full-time enrollment in the Virtual Academy prior to the start of school for scheduling and staffing purposes. Although this is a year long commitment, progress will be regularly monitored for student success and a recommendation may be made to move the student to in-person learning prior to the end of the school year

If a student in grades 6-12 wants a 'mixed schedule', meaning a schedule that includes both in-person and online courses, he/she will need to meet with their counselor and the Director of Student Services to develop their schedule and determine the best online course options. Mixed scheduling will only be available for high school students.

- **Returning to in-person School:** Students with a failing grade for 3 continuous calendar weeks will be reviewed for continuing online learning via the Virtual Academy. Families will be notified in writing that the student's placement in the online course(s) is being reviewed. If it is determined that continuing the online class is not in the student's best academic interests, the student will be transferred into a

traditional course and the online course will be dropped. For extenuating circumstances that might arise, families will work with their building principal and counselor to determine appropriate next steps.
- **Enrolling in Virtual Academy After Semester Starts:** If a student begins the semester in in-person courses and wants to switch to the full online learning via the Virtual Academy, they can make the request to their building principal and counselor. However, a schedule change is not guaranteed and will depend on space and teacher availability in classes.

Plagiarism & Academic Dishonesty

Cheating, stealing answers, plagiarizing, and academic dishonesty in any form, including inappropriate use or misuse of the school's computer network, will not be tolerated. The teacher will confiscate all evidence, document the situation, and in some cases report it to the grade level administrator. Depending upon the circumstances, the administrative action will range from a parent conference to suspension.

Role of the School Counselor & Director of Student Services

Role of the Director of Student Services:

- Enrolling students in the appropriate online classes based on the student's schedule (determined by the school counselor in collaboration with the student's family).
- Sending an email prior to school started to parents and students with information on how to access their online coursework.
- Acting as liaison between the online course provider, teachers, counselors, students, and families.

Supports from the school counselor include:

- Developing the student's schedule in collaboration with the student's family
- Checking students' academic status on a regular basis.
- Checking in with students who may have an emotional need.
- Contacting parents regarding emotional or academic concerns.
- Contacting parents regarding post-graduate planning.
- For high school seniors, ensuring students are staying on track for graduation.

District & State Testing

District Testing
Students will be assessed using the NWEA assessments three times a year and will participate in the Missouri Assessment Program (MAP) in the spring. All assessments and surveys listed in the annual Assessment Calendar will be required of online students.

State Testing
All Virtual Academy students are required to participate in the Missouri Assessment Program (MAP) and End of Course (EOC) testing when appropriate. MAP and EOC tests measure a students' progress toward mastery of the Show-Me Standards, which are the educational standards in Missouri. All testing is conducted at the local school site in which the student resides.
- **MAP:** All students in grades three through eight in Missouri will take the MAP test in communication arts and math. Students in grades five and eight will also take the MAP test in science.

- **EOC:** End-of-Course assessments are taken when a student has received instruction on the course-level expectations for an assessment, regardless of grade level (but typically in high school). EOC tests are required in the subject areas of algebra I, biology, English II and government.

Graduation Requirements

Link to Affton School District policy IKF: Graduation Requirements

Link to Affton School District policy IKFA: Early Graduation

Participation in the A+ Program

Students who are enrolled in the A+ program and take virtual courses will have their attendance recorded as 95%, thereby allowing them to meet the A+ program attendance requirements. Students enrolled in in-person coursework will have the attendance recorded based on actual seat time. Regardless of whether a student is enrolled in virtual or face-to face coursework, all A+ program expectations apply.

IEP & 504 Students

The school counselor and/or case manager will ensure your student's IEP or 504 has been distributed to the student's Virtual Academy teachers. Accommodations will be made accordingly.

Internet & Device Management

Affton School District is committed to providing students access to opportunities for learning. That commitment includes providing a device to all students with our 1-to-1 Chromebook learning experience. Each student is given a Chromebook that will allow them to access Canvas, communicate with the school and teachers, and access and complete learning activities. The district has a comprehensive guide available here: Affton School District Chromebook Policy Handbook.

For troubleshooting tips or to submit a help ticket, click here:
https://sites.google.com/view/afftontroubleshooting

Affton School District also understands the need to have access to the internet to participate in a virtual learning platform. The following is a link to help if you are having difficulty accessing reliable internet:
https://bit.ly/AfftonWiFiHelp

School Athletics & Activities

Students who wish to maintain eligibility for participation in activities or sports in the Affton School District must meet the requirements set forth in Section 2 of the MSHSAA Handbook, entitled Student Essential By-Laws. A

student who is already enrolled in the Affton School District and enrolls in online classes through the Virtual Academy may meet eligibility requirements outlined in By-Law 2.3.2 through meeting ALL of the following:

- The student is an enrolled student of the public middle/high school of residence, as defined in By-Law 3.10, and is taking a minimum of six credit-bearing, seat-time or Virtual Academy classes for a minimum of 3.0 units of credit at the school.
- All classes/assignments must be completed by the high school/middle school's close of the semester, as per By-Law 2.3.11, in order for those classes/credits to be considered toward activity eligibility.
- To be eligible in the following semester, students must earn a minimum of 3 full credits the semester prior.

Parents are strongly encouraged to review the MSHSAA handbook for further clarification regarding eligibility.

District Contact Information

Mesnier Primary Contact:
Dr. Tina Been
CBeen@afftonschools.net

Gotsch Intermediate Contact:
Dr. Christine Powers
CPowers@afftonschools.net

Rogers Middle School Contact:
Dr. Kevin Griffin
KGriffin@afftonschools.net

Affton High School Counselors:
Heather Mayfield (9th Grade)
Hmayfield@afftonschools.net

Lexi Berra (10th Grade)
ABerra@fftonschools.net

Jane Bohn (11th Grade)
JBohn@afftonschools.net

Mary Giunta (12th Grade)
MGiunta@afftonschools.net

Director of Student Services:
Dr. Loren Widmer LWidmer@afftonschools.net

Additional District Information

Link to Affton School District policy IGCD: Virtual Courses

Link to Affton School District administrative procedure IGCD-AP(1): Virtual Courses (Best Educational Interest Determination)

VIRTUAL ACADEMY ENROLLMENT REQUEST FORM

Student Name: _____Grade_____

Parent/Guardian Name:_____

Requested Date of Enrollment (semester/year):_____

Reason For Request:_____

_____

Name of Online Course	Enrollment Length (Semester/Year)	Prerequisites Met (Y/N)

Parent/Guardian Signature:_____Date:_____

Student Signature:_____Date:_____

DISTRICT APPROVAL

_____Date:_____
Signature & District Title

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