Course Choice

2026-2027 School Guide

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Course Choice Program

Purpose and Overview

Established by the LEARNS Act, Course Choice expands access to high-quality secondary-level courses for Arkansas students. Beginning in the 2026-2027 school year, students in grades 6–12 may enroll in selected courses that are not offered at their resident school. This flexibility allows students to pursue personalized academic pathways and prepare for success after graduation, whether they become enrolled, employed, or enlisted.

These courses will be offered through a variety of approved providers, including:

- Colleges and universities;
- Businesses or entities offering authorized vocational or technical courses;
- Approved digital learning providers;
- The Arkansas School for Mathematics, Sciences, and the Arts;
- Other educational entities authorized by the State Board; and
- Participating public school districts and open-enrollment public charter schools (rated A, B, or C) that wish to offer courses to students outside their own district or school.

Available courses may vary from year to year depending on the providers who choose to participate.

Provider and Course Quality

All Course Choice providers undergo evaluation and approval by the Division of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE). Providers must offer courses aligned to Arkansas Academic Standards and included in DESE's list of approved secondary courses.

A list of current participating providers will be available at the Course Choice Catalog. Users will be able to filter the catalog to view all approved providers.

Student Eligibility

Criteria for Student Participation

Students enrolled in a public Arkansas school in grades 6-12 may be eligible to participate in the Course Choice program. Eligibility is based on both the student's resident school and the courses offered at that school.[1]

All students are eligible to enroll in courses not offered[2] by their resident school. Students attending schools with a school letter grade of "D" or "F" may enroll in any course that meets graduation requirements, even if the course *is* offered at their school.

While eligible students have the right to participate in Course Choice, schools may make determinations about student participation in specific courses when appropriate. (e.g., missing prerequisites, transportation barriers, or unavoidable scheduling conflicts).

[1] *Homeschooled students are not eligible for Course Choice, but may access expanded course options through their Education Freedom Account (EFA).*
[2] *Offered courses include virtual sections of a course provided by a school.*

Student and Family Communication

Communication

Districts and schools are responsible for communicating Course Choice information to students and families, including each student's individual login credentials for the Course Choice Catalog. Schools should rely on existing communications channels, such as email, text/robocall systems, parent portals, school websites, and scheduling events to share program details.

All students and families must receive information about Course Choice during the school's annual course enrollment period so they can consider Course Choice options when making scheduling decisions.

Resource Toolkit

DESE has developed a set of resources to support schools in communicating with students and families about Course Choice. These materials may be used directly or adapted to meet local needs.

Course Choice student and family resources:

- Student/Family Flyer
- Student/Family Guidance
- Student/Family Slide Deck Template

Course Enrollment, Scheduling, and Withdrawal

School-level Roles and Responsibilities

Schools play a crucial role in ensuring that students have access to Course Choice opportunities. This guide outlines program details, including the school-level responsibilities required for implementation (a full list of responsibilities is available in the Appendix).

Each school must designate a **School Approver**, who oversees Course Choice enrollment requests and serves as the main point of contact for course coordination with students, families, and providers. This role may be filled by a

counselor or another assigned staff member. While one staff member may oversee the full program, schools may distribute responsibilities as needed.

Throughout this guide, the term School Approver refers to all school-level Course Choice management roles.

The Course Choice Catalog

The Course Choice Catalog is the system where participating providers list their available courses and course-specific information. Principals, Assistant Principals, and Counselors will have default access. Additional staff can be set up to approve enrollment requests as needed. The catalog also facilitates key communications between providers and schools.

Guidance on navigating the platform is available in the Course Choice Catalog User Guide.

Enrollment Requirements

Some Course Choice offerings include additional eligibility requirements related to course content, prerequisites, or location. Students must meet both the program's general eligibility rules and any course-specific requirements.

Students may enroll in any number of eligible Course Choice courses within a standard course load, provided they continue making progress toward graduation requirements. Students must remain enrolled in at least one course offered by their resident school during each scheduling period. Course Choice courses count toward a student's standard schedule and may not be added in excess of it.

Enrollment requests must be submitted through the Course Choice Catalog. Final enrollment is confirmed when the School Approver accepts the request based on eligibility.

Enrollment Support

The School Approver is responsible for using the Course Choice Catalog to review and approve enrollment requests and is the primary point of contact for students and families with enrollment questions.

To support enrollment, School Approvers should:

- Review the platform navigation instructions in the User Guide
- View training webinars and attend scheduled training sessions
- Coordinate with other staff involved in scheduling and enrollment to ensure smooth implementation

Enrollment Process

Schools must support students through the following steps during the enrollment period:

1. Utilize existing communication channels and toolkit materials to share Course Choice information,

including the catalog access and student login credentials
2. Ensure students understand their individual eligibility and can access the catalog during enrollment
3. Assist students in exploring the course catalog, making enrollment decisions[1], and submitting requests
4. Approve eligible course requests
5. Enter approved courses into eSchool

All enrollment decisions for the 2026-2027 school year must be final by ***August 31***. Districts are encouraged to set their own earlier enrollment deadlines so Course Choice can be integrated into their regular annual course enrollment process and follow the same local timeline.

[1]*By law, eligible students shall not be discouraged from participating in Course Choice.*

Course Availability and Waitlists

The Course Choice catalog displays seat availability and enrollment status for each course. If a course reaches capacity, some providers may offer a waitlist. Being on the waitlist does not guarantee enrollment. Schools should guide students in making alternative selections if a waitlist does not move in a reasonable timeframe during the enrollment period.

Course Withdrawal

Students may request to withdraw from a Course Choice offering if the course is not a good fit or if unforeseen circumstances arise. Withdrawal procedures should align with district or school policy. Some providers may have additional withdrawal deadlines, which will be listed in the catalog with links to each provider's drop policy.

Withdrawal requests must be submitted through the catalog and approved by the School Approver.

Scheduling

Schools should schedule Course Choice courses using their standard master scheduling process. New Course Choice–specific coding will be established to support accurate reporting and tracking. DESE will release technical coding guidance during the summer, with additional instruction provided through APSCN eSchool trainings.

Course Choice Operations and Logistics

Academic Calendar

To support statewide consistency across Course Choice offerings, DESE has established a standard academic calendar for all Course Choice courses. Because Arkansas school districts operate on varying local calendars with different start dates, holiday breaks, and professional development days, the Course Choice calendar ensures that providers, students, and schools have a unified structure for course pacing, deadlines, and grading.

- **Fall Term**: August 12 - December 18, 2026
- **Spring Term**: January 5 - May 20, 2027

When a student's resident school calendar does not align with the Course Choice academic calendar (e.g., different first day of school, early or late holiday breaks, or professional development days), providers must allow reasonable flexibility. This includes:

- Adjusting assignment deadlines when the student is not in session
- Understanding student absences due to district-scheduled breaks
- Ensuring that instructional pacing and course expectations do not penalize students for differences in local calendars

*In-person courses and concurrent credit courses will follow the academic calendar of the course provider.

Attendance

Providers are not required to submit daily course attendance; however, they must notify the student's school of chronic absences so the school can follow up and intervene. The school is responsible for addressing attendance concerns in accordance with district or school policy.

Payment and Course Materials

Students and families are not responsible for the cost of instructional materials specific to Course Choice participation—such as textbooks, software, lab kits, or other course-required resources. However, students may be expected to supply general school supplies (e.g., notebooks, pens, basic art supplies) as they would for any course. Additionally, to ensure smooth implementation across a variety of course types and delivery models, responsibilities for materials are shared among providers, schools, and students as outlined below:

Course Providers are responsible for:

- Supplying required instructional content and materials directly related to the course curriculum. This includes:
    - Textbooks (digital or physical)
    - Collaborating with School Districts on required software or licenses
    - Access to the course's Learning Management System (LMS)
    - Any required materials for assessments
- Communicating material needs (including estimated delivery timelines and any tech specifications) in the course listing and syllabus.
- Shipping materials in a timely manner, based on the Course Choice academic calendar.

Note: Providers are not required to supply computing devices or internet access. For more information, see "Guidance for Virtual Courses."

Schools are responsible for:

- Ensuring students have daily access to technology and devices needed to participate in virtual courses (e.g., Chromebooks, headsets, webcams), including calculators where specified.
- Providing or facilitating access to shared equipment for courses with specialized requirements (e.g., flight simulators, Adobe software, graphing calculators), and working with the course provider to ensure the requirements are accessible to the student.
- Verifying material delivery before the course begins and contacting the provider promptly if items are missing or delayed.

Students are responsible for:

- Maintaining care of all provided materials and returning items if required by the provider or school.
- Bringing materials to class or their assigned course location as needed.
- Notifying the School Approver if they have not received required materials before the course begins.
- Students may be expected to supply general school supplies (e.g., notebooks, pens, basic art supplies) as they would for any course.

Course Location

Course Choice offerings may be delivered on-site or online. On-site courses may take place at a high school, college campus, or other approved provider location. Schools may provide transportation at their discretion, but transportation is not required.

Virtual courses will be taken at the student's school unless the district establishes a policy that allows students to participate from another approved location. Details on expectations for virtual course administration are included in the Guidance for Virtual Courses section.

Coordination with Providers

DESE provides clear guidance and expectations for providers administering courses through Course Choice. Therefore, school-level coordination will be needed primarily to address questions or concerns about individual students' enrollment or participation in Course Choice courses. The School Approver is responsible for these communications.

Student Accountability and Grading

State Assessments

Schools remain responsible for administering all state-required assessments for students enrolled in Course Choice courses. A student's state assessment scores will continue to be tied to their resident school for accountability purposes.

Student Grading

Course providers are responsible for assigning grades to students enrolled in their courses. Providers will enter grades directly into the Course Choice Catalog for submission to the resident school. Grades are due in the Course Choice catalog two business days prior to the end of each term established by the Course Choice Academic Calendar.

Providers will monitor student progress throughout each term and must promptly notify the School Approver if a student misses multiple assignments, is failing or at risk of failing, demonstrates ongoing lack of engagement, or displays any other indicators that the student may not successfully complete the course**.** The School Approver will coordinate with the provider and other school staff as needed to determine a plan for intervention and support.

Student Experience, Safety, and Supports

Student Experience and Safety

Course Choice providers are responsible for ensuring that students are safe and supported while participating in their courses. Providers are expected to maintain appropriate safety and supervision practices when students are attending their courses.

For on-site courses, this includes ensuring a safe physical learning environment. For virtual courses, this includes maintaining online safety, appropriate conduct, and protection of student privacy.

Providers should report any safety, conduct, or well-being concerns to the School Approver, whether observed during on-campus virtual sessions or reported by students or families. The School Approver is responsible for coordinating follow-up with the provider or escalating concerns to the Course Choice program contact when needed.

Student Behavior

Course providers should document concerns about student behavior and share them with the School Approver. Schools are responsible for addressing behavior issues in coordination with a provider. Providers retain the right to dismiss a student from a course if a student's behavior poses a safety risk to themselves or others, or if significant behavior concerns continue despite prior interventions.

Accommodations and Supports

Schools are responsible for ensuring that students with disabilities and English learners receive the accommodations and supports required by their individual plans.

To support coordination, the Course Choice Catalog will identify students with IEPs, 504 plans, or English Learner plans using data pulled directly from student records in Triand. This allows providers to know when a student may need accommodations that affect course pacing, materials, or instructional supports.

Providers must coordinate with the student's school to support the implementation of any relevant and appropriate accommodations for the course format (e.g., extended time, alternative formats, assistive technology compatibility).

If a student or family reports that an accommodation is not being provided or that a barrier exists, the School Approver must follow up with the provider to resolve the issue promptly. Frequent communication with the student's case manager and progress monitoring are recommended practices to ensure accommodations and supports are implemented.

Guidance for Virtual Courses

Course Choice vs. Digital Learning

All Course Choice virtual courses must comply with the Rules Governing Distance and Digital Learning. However, it is important to note that Course Choice virtual courses are separate from district-supported digital learning options:

- Districts will continue their own agreements (MOUs) with digital learning providers, outside of the Course Choice program
- Even if the same provider appears in both systems, Course Choice courses follow Course Choice program requirements

Learning Environment

Schools are responsible for overseeing Course Choice virtual courses taken on their campus. Each district should establish a local policy for how these courses will be supported during the school day.

The following questions should guide the policy for these courses:

- **Technology access:** How will students access the required technology (e.g., computer, headphones, Wi-Fi network)?
- **Learning space**: Where will students work during their virtual courses? Will there be designated spaces, or will it vary based on the course and student needs?
- **Supervision**: Which staff members will monitor students during virtual course time? What expectations or responsibilities apply to supervising staff?
- **Accommodations**: How will staff supervising virtual courses know when students require accommodations

related to the learning environment, assistive technology, or other supports? Who is responsible?
- **Behavior and Conduct**: Are there additional behavior expectations for students while taking virtual courses on campus?

Guidance for Concurrent Credit Courses

Overview of Concurrent Credit Course Options

Concurrent credit courses allow students to earn both high school and college credit at the same time. Through Course Choice, students may access concurrent credit courses without needing a separate agreement (MOU) between their district and an institution of higher education.

Key features of Course Choice concurrent credit:
- A statewide agreement with the participating higher education institution replaces local MOUs.
- Students do not use the Access to Acceleration scholarship to pay for these courses; Course Choice covers the cost.
- All Course Choice concurrent credit courses undergo a course equivalency review to confirm the high school credit they satisfy.
- Credit information is clearly listed in the Course Choice Catalog.

Districts that already offer concurrent credit through their own agreements may continue doing so. These district-provided options operate outside of Course Choice.

Some higher education institutions may also offer secondary-level courses that do **not** carry concurrent credit. Schools should ensure students understand whether a course awards college credit before approving enrollment.

APPENDIX:

List of all School-Level Responsibilities for Course Choice Implementation:

Prior to Enrollment:
☐ Appoint a School Approver and designate who will oversee the program end-to-end.
☐ Share Course Choice program details and course options with students and families before the enrollment window.

During Enrollment:
☐ Support students in selecting courses and completing enrollment (**by August 31**).
☐ Coordinate with course providers on student-specific questions.
☐ Approve eligible course requests in the catalog and enter them into eSchool.
☐ Secure a space for students enrolled in online courses
☐ Ensure enrolled students have the necessary equipment and materials before the course begins.

Managing Student Course Completion:
☐ Implement a school-level policy for administering Course Choice virtual courses on campus.
☐ Coordinate with providers to address the following as needed:
☐ attendance concerns;
☐ interventions/support for students at risk of not completing courses;
☐ student safety concerns;
☐ behavior issues; and/or
☐ access to accommodations.
☐ Ensure students taking Course Choice courses complete state assessments at the school.
☐ Approve withdrawals in the catalog as needed.

Course Choice Contact Information

For any questions or concerns regarding the Course Choice program, please contact Course.Choice@ade.arkansas.gov.