

STATE OF RHODE ISLAND

R.I. Department of Elementary and Secondary Education

Regulations of the Board of Regents Governing Virtual Learning Education in Rhode Island



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Table of Contents

1		
2	Table of Contents	2
3	DEFINITIONS	3
4	1.0 AUTHORITY, SCOPE AND PURPOSE	5
5	2.0 ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES	5
6	2.1 RIDE Responsibilities and Functions	5
7	2.2 LEA Responsibilities and Functions	6
8	3.0 CUSTOMIZED LEARNING	6
9	3.1 Personalized learning opportunities	6
10	3.1.1 Individual Learning Plans.....	7
11	3.1.2 Elements of student control.....	7
12	3.2 Online delivery models	7
13	3.2.1 Role of teachers.....	7
14	3.2.2 Spectrum of delivery models.....	7
15	3.3 Access and Opportunity	8
16	3.3.1 Access to quality content, instruction and programming.....	8
17	3.3.2 24/7 access.....	8
18	4.0 QUALITY ASSURANCE	8
19	4.1 Content	9
20	4.2 Instruction	9
21	4.3 Programming	10
22	5.0 SYSTEMIC SUPPORTS FOR VIRTUAL LEARNING EDUCATION	10
23	5.1 Statewide policy	10
24	5.2 Resourcing, support, coordination, and articulation	10
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27 **DEFINITIONS**

28 As used in these regulations, the following words and terms have the following meaning,
29 unless the context indicates another or different meaning or intent:

- 30 (a) **Acceptable use policy (AUP)** – a policy that outlines the responsibilities of students,
31 teachers, staff and others as they use the computers, software applications, and Internet
32 when using the school or district computers or internet connections. AUPs also outline
33 the consequences for failure to adhere to this policy.
- 34 (b) **Asynchronous learning** - communication exchanges that occur in elapsed time
35 between two or more people. Examples are email, online discussion forums, message
36 boards, blogs, podcasts, wikis, etc.
- 37 (c) **Blended learning** – learning opportunities in which a student learns, at least in part, at
38 a supervised brick and mortar location away from home and, at least in part, through
39 online delivery with some element of student control over time, place, path, and/or
40 pace.
- 41 (d) **Brick and mortar site** – the physical location where teachers and students are
42 interacting and the location for some of the computers that students are using to
43 connect to the Internet and online sources.
- 44 (e) **Commissioner** – the Rhode Island commissioner of elementary and secondary
45 education.
- 46 (f) **Common Core Standards** – standards adopted by a majority of states, including Rhode
47 Island, that are robust and relevant to the real world, reflect the knowledge and skills
48 that young people need for success in college and careers, and provide a consistent,
49 clear understanding of what students are expected to learn.
- 50 (g) **Course** – a connected series of lessons and learning experiences that:
- 51 1. Establish expectations defined by recognized standards,
 - 52 2. Provide students with opportunities to learn and practice skills, and
 - 53 3. Include assessments of student knowledge and skills adequate to determine
54 proficiency at the level of academic rigor required by relevant content standards.
- 55 (h) **Dual Enrollment** – the concurrent earning of college credits while enrolled in high
56 school.
- 57 (i) **High speed broadband Internet access** – infrastructure that provides reliable
58 connections to the Internet which allows transfer of large quantities of complex digital
59 content at sufficient speeds to ensure fast and reliable delivery of data and content.
- 60 (j) **Individual Learning Plans (ILP)** - a planning and monitoring tool that customizes and
61 directs students' goals and development in three domains: academic, career, and
62 personal/social.

2012 Regulations of the Board of Regents Governing Virtual Learning Education in RI

- 63 (k) **Online (or distance learning)** – education in which instruction and content are
64 delivered primarily over the Internet.
- 65 (l) **Online courses** – an “online course” is one in which
66 more than half of the content is delivered by a teacher from a different location than
67 that of the student.
- 68 (m) **Online school program** – programming delivered by a school district or cooperative
69 of school districts, and provides an online, comprehensive and sequential program of
70 courses or grade-level coursework and instruction in which more than half of the
71 program is delivered online and more than half of the instruction is delivered online by
72 a teacher from a different location than that of the student.
- 73 (n) **Open enrollment** – students may enroll in online content and programming outside of
74 those online opportunities provided by the district of residence.
- 75 (o) **Synchronous learning** - Online learning in which the participants interact at the same
76 time and in the same space.
- 77 (p) **Virtual learning** – learning opportunities that make use of technology to enhance the
78 teaching and learning experience.
79

80

81 **1.0 AUTHORITY, SCOPE AND PURPOSE**

82 The Board of Regents for Elementary and Secondary Education (Board of Regents)
83 pursuant to its delegated statutory authority under the Rhode Island General Law Chapter
84 §16-60, promulgate these Regulations of the Rhode Island Board of Regents Governing
85 Virtual Learning Education (Regulations).

86 The Board of Regents recognizes that a variety of learning options, including online courses
87 and programs, are critical for 21st Century learners. The Board of Regents also recognizes
88 that online learning provides opportunities for students to access curriculum and
89 specialized courses in a flexible learning environment that might not otherwise be available.

90 The purpose of these Regulations is to establish comprehensive and coherent policies
91 governing Virtual Learning Education in Rhode Island. These Virtual Learning Education
92 Regulations promote and support customized learning experiences for all learners through
93 quality and engaging online content and programs and by allowing learners some element
94 of control over the time, place, pace, and path of their learning.

95 These Regulations will help ensure that future technologies and innovative online learning
96 activities can be integrated into existing practices in ways that continue to empower both
97 educators and learners. The Virtual Learning Education Regulations are framed around
98 four regulatory principles: 1) All learners in Rhode Island will have access to high quality,
99 rigorous, and relevant online learning opportunities; 2) virtual learning education in Rhode
100 Island will support all learners in meeting academic and career goals; 3) Rhode Island will
101 support reliable access to the Internet and technology tools necessary for virtual learning;
102 and 4) the Rhode Island Department of Education (RIDE) will coordinate these Virtual
103 Learning Education Regulations with policies developed by higher education institutions
104 and other state agencies.

105 **2.0 ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES**

106 **2.1 RIDE Responsibilities and Functions**

107 The responsibilities of RIDE include but are not limited to:

- 108 1) Ensuring that existing and future state policies do not limit or prohibit students
109 from engaging in online learning opportunities;
- 110 2) Ensuring open enrollment for all learners to provide greater access to quality
111 online content;
- 112 3) Promoting state policies to support a move to competency-based learning;
- 113 4) Reviewing and communicating the national standards that will guide the
114 development or purchase of quality online content, instruction and
115 programming;
- 116 5) Providing information to the educational community relating to online learning
117 content, instruction, programming and other online resources;

- 118 6) Promoting flexible student funding that supports access to online learning
119 opportunities;
120 7) Supporting statewide efforts to ensure adequate resources for bandwidth and
121 infrastructure; and
122 8) Supporting opportunities for statewide efficiencies to increase access to
123 technology and online learning.

124 **2.2 LEA Responsibilities and Functions**

125 LEAs shall support student access and engagement in a variety of online learning
126 opportunities such as online courses or online programs suitable for meeting the unique
127 learning needs of individual students. Responsibilities of LEAs include but are not limited
128 to:

- 129 1) Ensuring that all online content, regardless of the source, is rigorous, of high
130 quality, and, where appropriate, aligned to adopted state and LEA standards;
131 2) Providing professional development on the utilization and integration of virtual
132 learning opportunities into curriculum and instructional strategies;
133 3) Ensuring appropriate placement of students in online learning programs or
134 courses;
135 4) Communicating the criteria and procedures for enrolling and remaining
136 enrolled in online learning opportunities;
137 5) Communicating to students and parents or guardians acceptable online course
138 work that will meet state and local graduation requirements;
139 6) Clearly identifying online coursework opportunities that meet post-secondary,
140 college, or military enrollment requirements;
141 7) Ensuring the safety of all students in the online environment by adopting and
142 upholding acceptable use and internet safety policies or protocols; and
143 8) Creating and adopting a local virtual learning policy that provides all students
144 with access to online learning and that clearly communicates all of the above
145 and any other LEA procedures related to virtual learning education.

146 Recognition of which virtual learning opportunities fulfill coursework graduation
147 requirements is a local decision and shall be predicated on alignment to state adopted
148 standards and other relevant national and industry standards. Local graduation policies
149 must not limit access or prohibit approved online coursework from fulfilling graduation
150 requirements.

151 **3.0 CUSTOMIZED LEARNING**

152 **3.1 Personalized learning opportunities**

153 Technology can address the issues of relevance and engagement by providing a highly
154 personalized learning experience that builds upon learning styles, interests, and abilities
155 and allows students to work at their own pace. LEAs should incorporate online learning
156 opportunities as part of a comprehensive and personalized learning experience to meet
157 student interests, goals, and needs.

158 **3.1.1 Individual Learning Plans**

159 The Regents Secondary Regulations, the Basic Education Program, and the Regents Career
160 and Technical Regulations require each student to engage in the development of learning
161 plans that reflect his or her academic and career goals. Individual Learning Plans (ILP) and
162 the ILP process are designed to help each student reach his or her academic and career
163 goals. Quality online learning allows students to meet these goals through a wide variety of
164 courses, instructional strategies, curriculum, and relevant content. LEAs shall utilize
165 appropriate technology and online learning opportunities to help student achieve their
166 goals and prepare them for success in college and careers. Individual Learning Plans
167 should reflect each student’s engagement in virtual learning opportunities.

168 **3.1.2 Elements of student control**

169 All learners should be given the opportunity to choose a learning experience that supports
170 their learning style and allows them to progress at their own pace. Technology and online
171 learning programs provide students with some control over their learning because they
172 can engage in online content anytime, anywhere and can progress through the content at
173 their own rate. LEA virtual learning policies shall provide some level of flexibility for
174 student choice and shall allow for students to demonstrate achievement in self-paced
175 online coursework based on proficiency level rather than seat time.

176 **3.2 Online delivery models**

177 Digital learning programs can be offered synchronously and/or asynchronously to
178 customize the learning environment that meets learner needs and learning styles. The level
179 of teacher involvement in these programs varies as well; with teachers playing supporting
180 roles in some courses and taking more direct instructional roles in others.

181 **3.2.1 Role of teachers**

182 The role of teachers and the level of teacher involvement with their students vary
183 depending on the delivery model in use. In the blended learning classroom, the roles of
184 teachers and students are often quite similar to their roles in a traditional classroom. As
185 learning becomes more student-centered, the roles of teachers and students often change
186 and teachers become facilitators of learning and students gain some control and choice
187 over their learning experiences. Instructional technologies and quality online content
188 enable educators to develop customized learning experiences for students.

189 **3.2.2 Spectrum of delivery models**

190 There are several models for delivery of online learning ranging from blended learning
191 models that integrate online learning with face-to-face instruction in a brick and mortar
192 school to fully online learning experiences. These regulations do not limit the use of other
193 models for online learning. LEAs retain the flexibility to choose appropriate online delivery
194 models.

195
196 Blended learning occurs in a variety of venues and models and may incorporate online
197 content in the form of a lesson, a single course, or an entire curriculum. A blended
198 classroom or course provides flexibility and availability of programming that expands
199 learning beyond the day or school year. In a blended learning environment, teachers
200 facilitate students’ learning with direct instruction.

201
202 Virtual charter schools represent a more extensive online learning experience where
203 students may complete most of their course work online at locations other than a school
204 building. Virtual charter schools may also allow students to complete all required
205 coursework online. Virtual charter schools must adhere to the Board of Regents
206 Regulations Governing Rhode Island Public Charter Schools.

207
208 The intent of these Regulations is to ensure that all students have access to quality online
209 learning opportunities and to support LEAs in their role of identifying the online learning
210 activities that best meets each student’s needs and goals.

211 **3.3 Access and Opportunity**

212 The advent of digital learning requires investments in computer hardware, communication
213 networks, and technical support services. Decisions regarding spending on infrastructure
214 and quality content at both the state and LEA level shall be made with these needs in mind,
215 ensuring access to quality online learning for all learners.

216 **3.3.1 Access to quality content, instruction and programming**

217 LEAs shall have flexibility to make decisions regarding the development, adoption or
218 purchase of quality online content and programming based on local data and information
219 about student needs. Section 4.0 contains details regarding quality assurance for content,
220 instruction and programming.

221 **3.3.2 24/7 access**

222 Online learning opportunities provide the flexibility necessary for instruction and learning
223 to occur anytime and anywhere. Providing anytime, anywhere access to online coursework
224 will meet the needs of students who, for a variety of reasons, may not be able to “fit” their
225 learning into a traditional school schedule. Local policy shall not prevent student access to
226 quality online learning that occurs both within and outside of the traditional school setting.

227 **4.0 QUALITY ASSURANCE**

228 Learners in Rhode Island are assured access to quality instruction and learning
229 opportunities through these Virtual Learning Education Regulations as well as, the Rhode
230 Island Basic Education Program, the Regents Secondary Regulations, Regulations of the
231 Board of Regents Governing Career and Technical Education in Rhode Island, the Rhode
232 Island Teaching Standards and the Education Evaluation Program. The Regents Regulations
233 for Virtual Learning Education will complement and enhance existing regulations by
234 promoting students access to quality online learning opportunities as part of each student’s
235 pathway.

236 Nationally recognized, research-based standards and best policy and practices will form
237 the basis of RIDE developed guidance to LEAs and other educational organizations to
238 ensure the quality of online content, instruction and programming.

239 RIDE shall regularly review and revise guidance documents as necessary to reflect
240 promising practices and technology advances and innovations.

241 **4.1 Content**

242 Online content is the high quality academic material delivered through technology. It is
243 what students learn and ranges from new engaging, interactive software to classic
244 literature delivered through video lectures and games.

245 All content whether online or in print must be aligned to common state standards, national
246 and/or technical standards and reflect the guaranteed and viable curriculum available for
247 all students. Online content shall also reflect the scope, rigor, and depth of quality content
248 available through more traditional means. Online content shall be evaluated for
249 effectiveness and LEAs seeking to adopt online content should require data on the
250 effectiveness of that content including information such as student completion and
251 achievement. Locally developed content must be aligned to state adopted standards and
252 should follow nationally recognized standards for quality online content.

253 **4.2 Instruction**

254 To ensure that learners have access to quality online instruction, teachers or instructors
255 who teach directly in online courses, as well as those who support students in a blended
256 learning environment, shall be appropriately trained and/or certified as described in this
257 section.

258 **4.2.1 Certification**

259 In order to ensure that appropriately qualified or certified instructors are providing online
260 credit-bearing coursework, instructors shall meet one of the following requirements:

- 261 a) K-12 teachers providing online instruction directly to students in an online
262 environment shall be content certified in the state from which they are providing
263 the online content; or
264 b) K-12 site-based teachers who are responsible for supervising students participating
265 in credit-bearing online coursework that is not provided directly by an online
266 instructor shall have appropriate Rhode Island content certification; or
267 c) Instructors providing instruction for dual enrollment courses, which are identified
268 as credit-bearing courses, shall be appropriately qualified from an accredited post-
269 secondary institution.

270 Supplemental online materials adopted as part of LEA or school curricula or course
271 materials do not require special certification or qualifications for the teacher or instructor
272 using such online instructional material. Teachers using such supplemental materials, as
273 one of many sources of materials or activities to support their curricula, shall be
274 appropriately content certified for all Rhode Island site-based teachers.

275 **4.2.2 Training**

276 To ensure that teachers are effective in supporting student success in online learning
277 opportunities, whether through a blended learning model or a completely online model,
278 teachers must be knowledgeable in online instructional strategies and pedagogy.
279 Technology and online resources provide tools to support teachers in developing engaging,
280 relevant and customized learning opportunities. Training and professional development

281 opportunities focused on effective online instructional strategies and pedagogy through a
282 coordinated K-12 and higher education effort are critical to better prepare teachers to
283 support students in online learning environments.

284 Virtual Learning Education guidance documents will provide educators and administrators
285 with national models of teacher training and preparation programs that are effective in
286 preparing teachers for online learning.

287 **4.3 Programming**

288 It is expected that LEAs will embrace new technologies and virtual learning opportunities
289 to develop innovative blended learning models. As LEAs develop online learning programs,
290 they shall utilize nationally recognized best practices such as those included in RIDE Virtual
291 Learning Education guidance. Development of effective programs will include at a
292 minimum descriptions of online program leadership, instruction, content, student support
293 services and evaluation for effectiveness. Program design considerations must be made to
294 ensure equity and access.

295 **5.0 SYSTEMIC SUPPORTS FOR VIRTUAL LEARNING EDUCATION**

296 These Regulations seek to promote collaboration with higher education and state agencies
297 to establish connected and coherent statewide policies. Higher education, cross agency and
298 business partnerships can more effectively secure sufficient resources to ensure necessary
299 technology infrastructure and to promote virtual learning opportunities for all learners in
300 Rhode Island.

301 **5.1 Statewide policy**

302 Building a high quality education system is an investment in the future of all Rhode Island
303 students and in the future of Rhode Island's economy. Virtual Learning Education is a long-
304 term strategy that will support a quality education system, preparing students for post
305 secondary education and successful entry into the workforce. The development of a
306 coherent statewide system for online learning will require a coordinated statewide effort
307 with higher education and other state agencies.

308 These Regulations authorize the Commissioner to coordinate RIDE's efforts with higher
309 education and other state agencies to ensure the establishment of coherent statewide
310 virtual learning policies and to promote collaborations that result in efficiencies of scale
311 that support those policies.

312 **5.2 Resourcing, support, coordination, and articulation**

313 The potential and inevitable impact of online learning across K-12, adult education, higher
314 education, and workforce development necessitates that resources and supports be
315 coordinated across the state.

316 The Commissioner shall ensure that RIDE continues to seek new and innovative funding
317 solutions to ensure all learners have access to quality online content.

2012 Regulations of the Board of Regents Governing Virtual Learning Education in RI

318 The Commissioner shall ensure that RIDE participates in statewide efforts to support
319 Virtual Learning Education with a focus on ensuring all students have access to quality
320 online learning opportunities and ensuring efficiencies gained by coordinating resources.

321 Coordinated statewide efforts can ensure purchasing power to maintain necessary
322 infrastructure and acquire regular upgrades and negotiated lower costs for devices and
323 online content and programming.

324 Publicly available information regarding quality providers will support educators,
325 administrators, families and students to make informed judgments about online content
326 and programs. This information must be coordinated between RIDE and higher education
327 to ensure that families and students are aware of acceptable course work that meets both
328 graduation requirements and higher education acceptance and dual enrollment credit
329 recognition.

330 The Commissioner shall ensure that RIDE coordinates its efforts with higher education, the
331 legislature, and other key stakeholders to ensure the development of a comprehensive
332 statewide policy framework and to coordinate resources focused on providing all learners
333 access to quality online learning opportunities.