



GEORGIA Virtual School

<http://www.GAVirtualSchool.org>

Best Practice Policy and Procedure Tips For Schools and Districts

Board Rules, Local Policies and Procedures

Does my district need a local Board rule governing online learning?

Georgia Law O.C.G.A. 20-2-319 grants the State Board of Education and the Department of Education the authority to develop procedures to operate the Georgia Virtual School. State Board Rule 160-8-1.01 provides the Department of Education criteria, policy and procedures for operating the program. Therefore, it is not necessary for local school boards to create a local rule authorizing students to participate in online learning courses offered through the Department of Education's Georgia Virtual School. Some districts have rules that exclude transfer credit from online learning programs that are in direct contradiction to the State Department of Education Board Rule 160-8-1.01 that should be amended.

Do my school and/or district need to develop local policies to determine my district's students' involvement with the Georgia Virtual School?

Yes, your district should make local decisions in several areas of policy and practice. An example of a local policy would be the following:

Students meeting specific county course pre-requisites may enroll in Georgia Virtual School courses pending local school approval.

Some tips have been gathered from online schools and the Department of Education to answer many of the other logistical questions your district may have about student participation in the Georgia Virtual program. These are outlined in the questions and answers below.

Does my district serve private school and home school students?

No, your district does not serve them. Please direct all private and home school students to the Georgia Virtual School website (www.GAVirtualSchool.org) for information and assistance.

How do schools or districts code Georgia Virtual courses in our student information system?

Using the course numbers provided by Georgia Virtual, your district should ensure all Georgia Virtual courses are coded in their student information system by student. All online course numbers follow the same format of xx.3xxxxxxx and the teacher of record identifier should be 333333333. More details can be found on page 7 of this document.

Funding and Allocation of FTE-Funded Units of Instruction

In the State of Georgia, school districts maintain a variety of school schedules. Georgia Virtual School communicates instructional delivery in the language of Carnegie units. This means that for a 4 x 4 block school, 1 period equals 1 Carnegie unit of instruction. For a 6 + period a day schedule, 1 period equals ½ Carnegie unit of instruction.

How many FTE segment-funded units will Georgia Virtual allocate for my school or system this year?

For all public High Schools who earn FTE funding in the State of Georgia, Georgia Virtual School has no stipulated limit in the number of courses they may offer their students in each semester. High School students make take six FTE funded units each semester. High School students may take as many courses as their school approves using tuition with either the school or student paying. Middle school courses are all tuition based with either the student or school paying tuition.

Will my school or district lose funding for students enrolled in Georgia Virtual School courses?

Like joint enrollment, the FTE segment funding follows the student to the program providing the instruction. Only the state portion of the FTE segment for a student enrolled in a Georgia Virtual course will go to Georgia Virtual to pay for that instruction. No local FTE contribution for that student's segments will be redirected.

Does my school system get some money returned to the local system to offset facilitator or possible maintenance and operations expenses of students who may take courses in their school buildings?

Yes, for every 1/2 Carnegie unit of instruction reported at FTE counts, the school district shall have \$25 returned to cover facilitator and possible maintenance and operation expenses. This money will be returned to the school district with the understanding from Georgia Virtual that the money will be allocated to the local school of the enrolled students to offset any local expenses and pay a stipend to the facilitator. This rebate shall be sent to a school's central or district office from Georgia Virtual at the end of each semester.

Can the school or district pay for students to take Georgia Virtual courses outside of the regular school day?

Yes, Georgia Virtual has a tuition-based model for students needing courses in addition to their regular school day of FTE funded courses. If the school wishes to pay for these additional, outside-of-the-regular school day courses, the school or district facilitator should follow the directions in the registration system under the school will pay button to ensure that this occurs.

What funds can I use to pay students' tuition?

Districts may use any source of funds to pay for additional units of Georgia Virtual courses for their students that they deem appropriate. Check the local district policies for guidance.

Can the school or district pay for additional units of instruction over and above the 6 FTE funded units allowed in the State Board rule (see page 6 for further information) for students as a part of their regular school day schedule?

Yes. For students who are already enrolled for six state funded FTE segments, a school district may pay for that student to take additional units of instruction as a part of their regular school day or may choose to fund all units while retaining their state FTE earnings. A school may choose to be invoiced by the program for these units. Invoicing shall occur after the last session's 10 day drop period. The school facilitator should follow the directions in the registration system under the school will pay button to ensure that this occurs.

Selection of Students for Enrollment in Georgia Virtual Courses

May I approve any student to take an online course?

Not every student is a good candidate for online learning. The decision to approve students to enroll in either FTE-funded or tuition-funded online learning classes with Georgia Virtual is determined by the local school facilitator.

The following list outlines the typical qualities of successful online learners:

- Self-motivators
- Independent learners
- Computer literate (not "high tech") individuals
- Successful time managers
- Effective written communicators
- Risk takers
- Committed workers
- Open communicators (i.e. willing to ask for help, share problems, and/or concerns)
- Flexible workers (i.e. ability to work with a pre-set schedule of due dates that may not coincide with the schedule of their regular school day)

What about special education students? How will their needs be met?

Most students' IEP or 504 Plan objectives can be easily accommodated in the virtual classroom; however, it is the local school's responsibility, as part of the registration process, to provide Georgia Virtual with a copy of students' IEPs or 504 Plans. They will be reviewed and appropriate accommodations for students within the online learning environment will be implemented. Every attempt will be made to accommodate IEP and 504 Plan requirements; however, as a supplementary program, if Georgia Virtual cannot provide necessary accommodations, the student will not be enrolled in the program.

Is there an application process for my school or district?

No, there is no application process for your school or district. Students register for their courses online at www.GAVirtualSchool.org. However, before students are actually enrolled in their courses, students' choices must be approved through a local school approver/facilitator. When a student from your school registers to take a course online, your school will be contacted to provide that local approver/facilitator.

How do I approve or deny my students' registration choices?

After the local facilitator is identified, an account is created in the registration system and the facilitator is given a log in and password. When a student from the school registers for a Georgia Virtual course, the facilitator will be prompted via email to approve or deny the student's registration choices. The facilitator will do this through the registration system. The system is easy to use, and support is just a phone call or email away. Facilitators will be trained online and have continuous access to online resources to help them approve students for Georgia Virtual courses.

May a student drop a course?

Fall and Spring Semesters

During the fall and spring semesters, students who complete or opt out of the student orientation course prior to or on the first day of school are eligible to request a refund during the first ten school days. Students who complete or opt out of the student orientation course after the first day of school are eligible to request a refund for up to ten school days after completing or opting out of the student orientation course. Students who neither complete orientation nor opt out of it will be moved into their courses on the last start date of the semester and are eligible to request a refund during those first ten school days after being moved into their courses.

Prior to requesting a refund, a request should be submitted to withdraw from the course. Facilitators must submit a helpdesk ticket to request withdrawal of students. Withdrawal requests submitted during the last five school days of the semester will not be accepted. After the facilitator has requested withdrawal, the student can then submit a helpdesk ticket to request a refund. There is a \$25 processing fee subtracted from the refund amount. Students who have had course access for more than ten school days are not eligible for a refund. Schools that pay for a course with FTE will only be able to retain the FTE segment(s) if the student is withdrawn during the first ten school days that the student has course access.

Note that if a student moves from one course to another that is not grounds for a refund. If a request is made to move a student from a full unit AB course to a half credit A or B course, no partial refund will be issued nor will any partial credit carry over to subsequent semesters. Instead, students can request a refund during the first ten days of course access then, if the registration window is still open, register for the other course and pay for it separately.

Summer Semester

During the summer semester, students who complete or opt out of the student orientation course prior to or on the first day of school are eligible to request a refund during the first three school days. Students who complete or opt out of the student orientation course after the first day of school are eligible to request a refund for up to three school days after completing or opting out of the student orientation course. Students who neither complete orientation nor opt out of it will be moved into their courses on the last start date of the semester and are eligible to request a refund during those first three school days after being moved into their courses.

Prior to requesting a refund, a request should be submitted to withdraw from the course. Facilitators or parents must submit a helpdesk ticket to request withdrawal of students. Withdrawal requests submitted during the last five school days of the semester will not be accepted. After the facilitator or parent has requested withdrawal, the student can then submit a helpdesk ticket to request a refund. There is a \$25 processing fee subtracted from the refund amount. Students who have had course access for more than three days are not eligible for a refund.

Note that if a student moves from one course to another that is not grounds for a refund. If a request is made to move a student from a full unit AB course to a half credit A or B course, no partial refund will be issued nor will any partial credit carry over to subsequent semesters.

Are parents notified of student progress in class(es)?

Yes, parents are given access to view their students' progress in class. Parents can also check the class gradebook and can email teachers anytime. If a parent does not have access to the Internet, Georgia Virtual teachers contact parents directly via telephone at specific times during the course. In addition, once a week an automated calling system contacts the homes to report progress.

Scheduling of Classes & Instruction

Do I need to allocate a classroom or computer lab for a specific period per day in my building for Georgia Virtual School students?

Ideally, you would like to schedule students in a computer lab or provide them with a wireless notebook/classroom. Schools often check out inexpensive netbooks for use by Georgia Virtual students during a period in the media center. You can schedule all Georgia Virtual School students during the same period of the day no matter what subject matter they are taking with the program. Students can sit in the lab, media center, or classroom and complete their online course while being supervised by an adult monitor. High schools often schedule students to take their online learning courses the first or last periods of the day, similar to work study or joint enrollment. This can give students the flexibility to take the class from home or anywhere there is an Internet-connected computer. By scheduling in this manner, you alleviate the need for space or supervision of students. However, this is a bit harder with the middle school student due to transportation issues.

Do I need to supervise my students taking online classes?

You do need to supervise your students only if you schedule the students to take the Georgia Virtual School course in the school building. *Please note – if students are scheduled to take courses during the regular school day in a certain period, the Georgia Virtual teacher will not necessarily be online at that time. Georgia Virtual offers asynchronous learning; therefore, do not set up the expectation for your students that the Georgia Virtual*

teacher will be “live” with them during the period into which you have scheduled them. Georgia Virtual teachers have 24 hours to respond to student inquiries.

The following table outlines the pros and cons of requiring the student to take the course within the school building.

Pros

Supervision in building	Singleton course to schedule around
Comfort level of administration	Need for supervision, space, and technology
Comfort level for parents	Costs of supervision
Ability to check students progress daily face-to-face (facilitators can always check student progress online)	A preliminary study showed students doing other work during that period when taking classes in a building and accessing online class after hours
No transportation issues for Middle School students and parents	Working with final exam and school schedule to ensure student has access to a computer.

Supervision of Students Taking Courses in the School Building

If your school/district requires that students must engage in instruction inside the school building, the following may assist you in scheduling.

- Schedule students into a similar period and provide a supervisor.
- Embed online students into a smaller, traditional class period that has computers in the room and has a regular classroom teacher to “watch over” online students for attendance purposes.
- Schedule students into the media center for their Georgia Virtual class period supervised by media center staff.

The facilitators must still monitor students’ progress, provide students’ Georgia Virtual grades to appropriate local school personnel, and act as a liaison between Georgia Virtual and the students, parents, and local schools when necessary. Facilitators can check student progress online at anytime, from any Internet-connected computer.

Supervision of Students Taking Courses outside the School Building

The local school facilitator will supervise students taking their courses outside of the school building. This will involve keeping up with students' progress, collecting and administering students' Georgia Virtual grades to appropriate, local school personnel, and acting as a liaison between the Georgia Virtual program and the students, parents, and local schools when necessary. Facilitators can check student progress online at anytime, from any Internet-connected computer. If needed, they can access student progress online during the regular school day or schedule after school meetings face-to-face.

How many Carnegie units can a student engage in online learning each semester?

The State Department of Education allows students to take courses during the regular school day from Georgia Virtual paid through FTE funds. Students may take unlimited additional units in tuition-based online courses from Georgia Virtual, subject to local school or home school facilitator approval. Summer session is not state funded.

What security measures are in place?

Tests are password protected and set up with time limits. Questions on tests are randomized and are implemented from a pool of available questions. Students are locked out of the Internet and cannot communicate with each other during assessments. At any time, if Georgia Virtual instructors suspect academic dishonesty by students, the teacher can require the students to retake the assessment in a proctored setting.

What information do I need to input into my student information and data reporting systems?

Georgia Virtual course numbers are provided on our course catalog available on our home page each semester. When putting a student's schedule in an student information system, input the correct 9 digit course number for the Georgia Virtual course. All Georgia Virtual courses start with a "3" as the first number to the right of the dot (11.3240001). Use 333333333 as a teacher of record in your system for all Georgia Virtual courses.

Local School Facilitators

Do I have to assign a local school facilitator to help students enrolled in Georgia Virtual? If yes, what are his or her responsibilities?

Yes, the local school facilitator is the Georgia Virtual contact person in the local school. This individual may be a classified or certified staff member. Facilitators help the Georgia Virtual teachers and administrators "reach out and touch" the students. They are not the teacher and have no instruction or remediation responsibilities, nor are they responsible for solving technology or accessibility issues if student is taking the course off-site.

What exactly does the facilitator do?

Facilitators have certain responsibilities to help their students be successful; therefore, they do agree to perform duties as needed that may include some or all of the below:

- Approve or deny a student to engage in online learning course through Georgia Virtual. If the facilitator is not the student's counselor, he or she will consult with the appropriate counselor before granting course approval.
- Select the funding method for each student's approved course.
- Provide an IEP or 504 Plan to Georgia Virtual (fax) if a special education student is requesting accommodations.
- Physically check with the students during the first week of class to determine if they have any course concerns, technology concerns, illness, or trouble understanding content, and provide that information to the teacher and/or Georgia Virtual administrators.
- Check students' progress online once a week via the Internet by checking the gradebook in the students' courses or accessing the current grade average posted in the facilitator portal.
- Communicate issues or concerns with or for students to Georgia Virtual administrators.
- Help students solve technology problems, such as facilitating access to a school computer, to help them get started.
- Retrieve final grades from the facilitator portal, and ensure that the grade is transcribed to student's record.

Do facilitators receive any training or have anyone to call at Georgia Virtual when they have a question?

Yes, facilitators will be enrolled in an online training course to support them in getting familiarized with the registration system and learning platform, as well as understanding the expectations for their position and the expectations of participating students. In addition, they will always have access to their online facilitator training course for reference, and may contact their Georgia Virtual regional support person at any time. Facilitators may request Professional Learning Units for completing the online training course.

Are facilitators paid?

It is strongly suggested that facilitators receive a stipend from monies returned to the local district for every Carnegie unit of instruction taken by students in that district via the Georgia Virtual program. Local school district policies will determine this procedure of payment, but it is recommended that the facilitators receive a stipend in the minimum amount of \$25 for every Carnegie unit completed by students at their schools.

For the most current information concerning Georgia Virtual School, please visit the website www.gavirtualschool.org or email information@gavirtualschool.org. Policies are subject to change.