



Commonwealth of Massachusetts Virtual School Performance Criteria

As defined in in 603 CMR 52.00, the guiding areas of virtual school accountability are academic program success, organizational viability, and faithfulness to certificate. These criteria: articulate the expectations for a virtual school from initial application throughout the certificate term; provide clear guidance about how the Massachusetts Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (Board), the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (ESE), and the Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education (Commissioner) define virtual school success and on what basis the school will be evaluated; and clarify the connection between virtual school accountability and the Massachusetts school and district accountability system

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Overview

Guiding areas of virtual school accountability

As defined in 603 CMR 52.00, the guiding areas of virtual school accountability are academic program success, organizational viability, and faithfulness to certificate. These criteria:

- Articulate the expectations for a virtual school from initial application throughout the certificate term;
- Provide clear guidance about how the Massachusetts Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (Board), the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (ESE), and the Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education (Commissioner) define virtual school success and on what basis the school will be evaluated; and
- Clarify the connection between virtual school accountability and the Massachusetts school and district accountability system

Principles guiding the development of these criteria

The following principles guided the development of these criteria:

- Protecting of autonomies that allow the virtual school to exercise the operational autonomy to determine the means by which it achieves student outcomes, incorporating additional performance metrics, beyond those articulated through Massachusetts School and District Accountability System, which capture the unique aspects of virtual school accountability.
- Ensuring that key aspects of virtual school performance are integrated with fidelity.
- Facilitating clear communication about performance expectations between ESE and the virtual school.
- Aligning the virtual school's performance expectations to the principal measures articulated through the Massachusetts school and district accountability system.
- Aligning the state's Conditions for School Effectiveness (CSE), particularly Condition V (student assessment), VI (principal's staffing authority), and VII (professional development and structures for collaboration) to characteristics of virtual school success.
- Leveraging best practices from organizations that develop online program review criteria, including the International Association for K-12 Online Learning, the Southern Regional Educational Board, the Northeast Comprehensive Center, the Sloan-C Consortium, and Quality Matters.
- Incorporating knowledge and expertise provided by the state's Digital Learning Advisory Council (DLAC).
- Balancing clear performance expectations for the virtual school with Commissioner and Board discretion; for example, by not dictating high stakes accountability decisions such as conditions, probation, revocation, or renewal decisions in a formulaic manner. The Commissioner and/or the Board have the discretion to consider all qualitative and quantitative factors when making these decisions, with priority placed on student performance and growth.

Using the criteria during the certificate term

A virtual school should use these criteria as a self-assessment to monitor the overall health and viability of the school throughout the school's certificate term. In addition, the school should examine evidence collected and reported by ESE through analysis of data submitted by the school and through accountability reviews.

Using the criteria to inform renewal recommendations

ESE will evaluate the performance of the virtual school using quantitative and/or qualitative evidence reported by the school and collected by ESE throughout the school's certificate term. The school must demonstrate affirmative evidence of success in all three guiding areas of virtual school accountability for recertification. The school will undergo a rigorous renewal process during the final year of its certificate term, the purpose of which is to recommend to the Commissioner and the Board whether or not the school may continue to operate. The renewal process includes the submission of a renewal application, a renewal inspection visit, and an analysis of all evidence related to the performance of the school.

Criteria Summary

Rating Scale:

Exceeds	The school fully and consistently meets the criterion and is a potential exemplar in this area
Meets	The school generally meets the criterion; minor concerns are noted
Partially meets	The school meets some aspects of the criterion but not others and/or moderate concerns are noted
Falls far below	The school falls far below the criterion; significant concern(s) are noted

Guiding area	Criteria	Rating	
Faithfulness to certificate	1. Mission and key design elements: The school is faithful to its mission, implements the key design elements outlined in its certificate, and substantially meets its accountability plan goals		
	2. Access and equity: The school ensures program access and equity for all students eligible to attend the school		
	3. Compliance: The school compiles a record of compliance with the terms of its certificate and applicable state and federal laws and regulations		
Academic and program success	4. Student performance: The school consistently meets state student performance standards for academic growth, proficiency, and college and career readiness		
	5. Program delivery: The school delivers an academic program that delivers improved academic outcomes and educational success for all students	Curriculum	
		Instruction	
		Assessment and program evaluation	
		Diverse learners	
	6. Culture and family engagement: The school supports students' social and emotional health in a safe and respectful learning environment that engages families	Social, emotional, and health needs	
Family and community engagement			
Organizational viability	7. Capacity: The school sustains a well-functioning organizational structure and creates a professional working climate for all staff	School leadership	
		Professional climate	
		Contractual relationships	
	8. Governance: The Board of Trustees act as public agents authorized by the state and provide competent governance to ensure the success and sustainability of the school		
	9. Finance: The school maintains a sound and stable financial condition that operates in a fiscally responsible and publicly accountable manner		

Faithfulness to certificate

ESE will consider a wide body of evidence, which includes, but is not limited to, the following: the school's original application for a certificate and subsequent amendments (if applicable); annual reports; site visits and accountability reviews; renewal inspection reports; data derived from the Student Information Management System (SIMS) and the Educator Personnel Information Management System (EPIMS); accountability plans; recruitment and retention plans; enrollment data; opening procedures activities; Coordinated Program Review Reports and Mid-Cycle Review Reports; complaints received and resolution status; documentation of current Certificate of Occupancy, Health, Safety, and Fire Inspections; the school's website and promotional materials; and information from interviews, focus groups, and observations of instruction.

1. Mission and key design elements

The school is faithful to its mission, implements the key design elements outlined in its certificate, and substantially meets its accountability plan goals

Key indicators include but are not limited to:

- School stakeholders share a common and consistent understanding of the school's mission and key design elements outlined in the certificate. The mission maintains and abides to the faithfulness and to the purpose and values of the school.
- The school has fully implemented the key design elements in the approved certificate and any subsequently approved amendments.
- School stakeholders continually deepen and develop a common and consistent understanding of the school's mission, educational goals, and key design elements in the certificate.
- The school makes available to the public its accountability goals and specific strategies for reaching these goals through various means, including, but not limited to, posting on the school's website.

2. Access and equity

The school ensures program access and equity for all students eligible to attend the school.

Key indicators include but are not limited to:

- The school ensures that information is readily available to parents, students, and the general public regarding non-discriminatory enrollment practices
- The school ensures that information is readily available to parents, students, and the general public regarding the availability of specialized programs and services at the school to meet the needs of all students, particularly those enrolled in special education, English language learners and those with other diverse learning needs
- The school ensures that information is readily available to parents, students, and the general public regarding school policies, including, but not limited to discipline policies
- The school allows all students to access the educational program.
 - Students with disabilities are provided with the appropriate assistive technologies, accommodations, supports, adaptations and related services as required by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) and Section 504 of the U.S Rehabilitation Act.
 - Digital content is accessible in accordance with Section 508 of the U.S Rehabilitation Act.
 - The school provides an initial assessment of each student, and/or is in possession of any specialized plan for the student to ensure that all students receive the appropriate types of academic and non-academic support.
 - The school discloses accurate information relating to its online program, including: its mission; accreditation, if applicable; courses and programs; services; policies; recruitment processes and incentives; and other factors considered important to prospective and current students and stakeholders.
 - The school analyzes attrition data.

3. Compliance

The school compiles a record of compliance with the terms of its certificate and applicable state and federal laws and regulations.

Key indicators include but are not limited to:

- The school is operated in accordance with the provisions of General Laws chapter 71, section 89, and 603 CMR 23.00, 603 CMR 35.00, 603 CMR 49.00, 603 CMR 52.00, 603 CMR 51.00, Title IX and all other applicable federal, state, and local laws, regulations, required trainings and deadlines and such additional guidance as ESE may establish at Massachusetts Laws and Regulations.
- The school complies with all legal requirements, including but not limited to the following: the Open Meeting Law; Public Records Law; Coordinated Program Review requirements; and all local laws related to health and safety codes.
- The school undertakes corrective action when needed and implements necessary safeguards to maintain compliance with all legal requirements.
- Faculty hold the appropriate licensure and teach in their licensed field for all taught courses or teach under a waiver pursuant to G.L.c. 71, § 38G.
- Administrators, faculty and other mandatory reporters receive training on recognizing and reporting suspected child abuse and neglect pursuant to G.L.c 119, §51A.

Academic and program success

ESE will consider a wide body of evidence, which includes, but is not limited to, the following: the school's original application for a certificate and subsequent amendments (if applicable); annual reports; site visits and accountability reviews; renewal inspection reports; data derived from the Student Information Management System (SIMS) and the Educator Personnel Information Management System (EPIMS); the school's accountability report (see 4.1.1-4.1.3), including analyses of the performance of student subgroups that may be statistically insignificant for state reporting purposes; curriculum documents; internal program evaluation reports; relevant needs assessments; the School safety and Discipline Report (SSDR); parent/guardian and student surveys; and state or other assessment data that align with the school's certificate and with the approval of ESE.

4. Student performance

The school consistently meets state student performance standards for academic growth, proficiency, and college and career readiness.

Key indicators include but are not limited to:

- Progress and Performance Index (PPI)
The PPI combines information about narrowing proficiency gaps, growth, and graduation and dropout rates into a single 100-point measure. A school's cumulative PPI is the average of its annual PPIs over the most recent four year period, weighting recent years the most (1-2-3-4). A student group is considered to be on track to meeting its proficiency gap narrowing goals if it's cumulative PPI is 75 or higher.
- School percentile
A school percentile (1-99) represents a school's overall performance relative to other schools statewide within the same grade span. The school percentile comprises all of the indicators included in the PPI, and is reported for schools that have at least four years of data. A school with a percentile of 20 or lower is among the worst performing 20 percent of schools statewide.
- Accountability level
All schools with sufficient data are classified into Levels 1-5, with the highest performing in Level 1 and the lowest performing in Level 3 through 5. Approximately 80 percent of schools statewide are classified into Level 1 or 2 based on the cumulative PPI of all students and high needs students. For a school to be classified into Level 1, the cumulative PPI for all students and high needs students must be 75 or higher.
- Other indicators

In the event that a school believes that the core indicators are not fully representative of student performance at the school (including instances where the school's PPI may meet or exceed 75, but the school is classified in Level 3), ESE may consider request to review additional valid and reliable data demonstrating the progress the school has made in meeting this benchmark, and will review such evidence on a case-by-case basis. The most compelling cases will focus primarily on a strong body of evidence that points to consistent performance improvements over the certificate's term. In addition, while ESE will consider other assessment data as supplementary evidence for a school's performance, it will not supplant state assessment results with other assessment results.

Schools are free to articulate additional student performance measures using state or other assessment instruments that align with their certificate, with the approval of ESE, which will be codified with the school's Accountability Plan and assessed in this section.

NOTES: The period of evaluation will focus on the beginning of the certificate term through the end of the penultimate year of the certificate term, though historical data from prior related operational history will also be considered. For example, if a school's certificate term runs from July 1, 2012, through June 30, 2017, the data under consideration will include results available through the end of the 2015-2016 school. For renewal terms, the last year of the prior certificate term will be considered as a baseline for the next certificate term, and longer-term historical trends may also be considered.

All academic performance standards are based on state assessments and data collected through the Student Information Management System (SIMS), including graduation rate and drop-out rate data, for all tested subjects at all grade levels and all accountability subgroups unless otherwise indicated.

ESE may consider the performance of the school in comparison with other public schools with similar demographics in the district of location and the state, particularly in instances where the school does not meet state student performance standards.

ESE reserves the right to revise the measures used in this criterion in order to accommodate changes in state assessments, metrics, or accountability requirements, including any new U.S. Department of Education requirements that may be enacted during the certificate term. ESE may develop additional performance measures for virtual schools that develop alternative education programs.

5. Program delivery

The school delivers an academic program that delivers improved academic outcomes and educational success for all students.

Key indicators include but are not limited to:

- Curriculum
 - The school's documented curriculum is aligned to state curriculum frameworks and expectations
 - The school's documented curriculum is aligned vertically between grades and horizontally across classrooms at the same grade level and fully implemented in all courses
 - The school's documented curriculum supports opportunities for all students to master skills and concepts.
 - The school's documented curriculum is regularly reviewed and revised.¹
- Instruction
 - School staff have a common understanding of high-quality instruction.
 - Instructional practices are aligned to a common understanding and based on high expectations for all students.
 - Instruction fosters student engagement.
 - Instructional environments are conducive to learning.²
- Assessment and program evaluation
 - The school uses a balanced system of formative, summative and benchmark assessments.

¹ Aligned with CSE III: Aligned Curriculum

² Aligned with CSE IV: Effective Instruction

- The school uses qualitative and quantitative data to improve student outcomes.
- The school uses qualitative and quantitative data to evaluate the quality and effectiveness of the program in serving all students and modifies the program accordingly.³
- The school's assessments enable students to monitor their own learning progress in order to adjust and improve upon their learning.
- The school's assessments use a range of evidence and multiple methods including state assessments to assess student performance.
- The school assesses a variety of types of student performance and products.
- The school uses formative assessments and district-determined measures to inform instructional practices.
- The school's assessments provide for timely and frequent feedback about student progress and supports the student to persist in meeting academic goals.
- The school disseminates testing proctoring protocols to the appropriate staff and ensures that tests are proctored in accordance with the protocols. Documentation of the proctoring training and processing of the test materials are kept appropriately.
- The school ensures that diagnostic tests and educational services are administered by appropriately credentialed professionals and documentation is maintained per federal and state laws.
- **Diverse learners**
 - The school provides supports to meet the academic needs for all students, including but not limited to students with disabilities and English language learners.⁴
 - Supports are designed with consideration for time and place limitations of students.
 - The school is sensitive to the individual needs and cultural differences of students.
 - The school provide timely, effective technical support to ensure continuity in learning.
 - The school ensures academic advising and instructional support is provided for students to meet requirements of the program and/or school.
 - The school provides resources and/or information to assist students in determining the appropriateness of specific courses for meeting their academic needs.
 - Students, parents and guardians are provided clearly understandable information that explains the environment required to support online learning.

6. School culture and family engagement

The school supports students' social and emotional health in a safe and respectful learning environment that engages families.

Key indicators include but are not limited to:

- **Social, emotional, and health needs:**
 - The school creates a safe learning environment and addresses the physical, social, emotional, and health needs of its students by provisioning school guidance counselors and other professionals to work with students and families.⁵
 - The school's policies and procedures provide for age appropriate supervision for students under the age of 14, if applicable.
- **Family and community engagement:**
 - The school develops strong working partnerships with families in order to support students' academic progress and social and emotional well-being.⁶

³ Aligned with CSE V: Student Assessment

⁴ Aligned with CSE VIII: Tiered Instruction and Adequate Learning Time

⁵ Aligned with CSE IX: Students' Social, Emotional and Health Needs

⁶ Aligned with CSE X: Family-school Engagement

- Faculty and staff communicate to families' critical information about student progress so that parents and "learning coaches" are engaged with teachers and administrators for supporting online learning.
- The school develops relationships with the broader community to support student academic progress and the social and emotional well-being students and families.
- The broader community is engaged to facilitate access and equity for all students.

Organizational viability

ESE will consider a wide body of evidence, which includes, but is not limited to, the following: the school's original application for a certificate and subsequent amendments (if applicable); annual reports; site visits and accountability reviews; renewal inspection reports; data derived from the Student Information Management System (SIMS) and the Educator Personnel Information Management System (EPIMS); annual financial audits, virtual school end-of-year financial reports and other financial data; minutes of the board of trustees; staff surveys; documentation of school policies, procedures, and processes; self-evaluations, self-studies, and other improvement efforts led by the board of trustees; evaluation of the school leader and other school administrators; family, student, staff, and board of trustees handbooks; and professional learning calendars, agendas, and related outcomes.

7. Capacity

The school sustains a well-functioning organizational structure, and creates a professional working climate for all staff.

Key indicators include but are not limited to:

- School Leadership:
 - The school has an effective school leadership team that obtains staff commitment to improving student learning and implements a clearly defined mission and set of goals.⁷
 - The school defines and delineates clear roles and responsibilities among leaders, staff, management and board members, reflecting a culture of shared accountability.
 - The school has clear and well-understood systems for decision making and communication processes among all members of the school community.
- Professional Climate:
 - The school has structures for regular, frequent collaboration and professional development to improve implementation of the curriculum and instructional practice.⁸
 - A system is in place for monitoring instructional practice for consistency, which includes a formal process of teacher evaluation.
 - Includes a system is in place for monitoring instructional practice for consistency, which includes a formal process of teacher evaluation that provides and encourages staff participation in an induction and mentoring program including staff training in the unique dynamics related to online learning.
 - The organizational structure indicates appropriate staffing levels including student to teacher ratios that are critical to the success of the online program and ensures that all staff are qualified and trained to deliver online instruction.
- Contractual Relationships (If applicable):
 - The board of trustees and school leadership establish effective working relationships with their vendor (partner).
 - Changes in the school's relationship with its vendor (partner) comply with required certificate amendment procedures.

⁷ Aligned with CSE II: Effective School Leadership

⁸ Aligned with CSE VII: Professional Development and Structures for Collaboration

8. Governance

Members of the board of trustees acts as public agents authorized by the state and provides competent and appropriate governance to ensure the success and sustainability of the school.

Key indicators include but are not limited to:

- The board recruits, selects, orients and trains members with skills and expertise that enable them to sustain an excellent school. The board's recruitment encourages diversity in its applicants.
- Board members are active and engaged; know and fulfill their legal responsibilities and obligations; exercise their fiduciary duties of care and loyalty; comply with the board's bylaws; and always act in the best interests of the school.
- The board engages in strategic and continuous improvement planning by setting, and regularly monitoring progress relative to priorities and goals that are aligned with the school's mission, vision, and educational philosophy.
- The board demonstrates appropriate oversight of the virtual school administration, progress towards meeting academic and other school goals, and alignment with the mission and other terms of the certificate, without managing the day-to-day operations of the school.
- The board hires, evaluates per 603 CMR 35.00 and removes, if necessary, qualified personnel to manage the virtual school's day-to-day operations and holds these administrators accountable for meeting specified goals.
- The board has clear and well-understood systems for decision-making and communication processes; board meetings are designed to foster open, deliberate, and thorough discussions to facilitate and ensure public accountability.
- The board regularly approves updated school policies to ensure compliance with applicable requirements and that facilitate efficient, effective operations.
- The board utilizes a performance-based evaluation process for regularly evaluating itself, and any vendor or management company (if applicable).
- The board ensures school sustainability by establishing clear processes for board and school leadership succession.
- The board and administration conducts ongoing internal evaluations that include consistently evaluating faculty to assure instructional quality, using clear, consistent policies, measures and procedures.
- The administration sets educator performance standards and conducts ongoing internal evaluations that include determining program success by measuring student achievement and community satisfaction based on valid and reliable assessment techniques.
- The school communicates evaluation results to program stakeholders, districts that have students enrolled in the school and local communities.
- The board defines the institution's policy regarding the ownership of the course materials and intellectual property developed in the course by the instructor.

9. Finance

The school maintains a sound and stable financial condition and operates in a financially sound and publicly accountable manner.

Key indicators include but are not limited to:

- The school maintains a sound and stable financial condition and demonstrates a history of positive net assets, adequate cash flow to sustain operations and support the academic program, as evidenced by performance on key financial indicators, such as: current ratio, unrestricted days cash, change in net assets percentage, and debt-to-asset ratio.
- The school develops an annual budget that can be sustained by enrollment and other sources of historically stable revenue. The budget supports student performance.
- The school uses an accurate accounting system and engages in appropriate budgetary planning, budget oversight and budget revision.
- The school has and is maintaining appropriate internal controls, documented by a written set of fiscal policies and procedures.
- The school follows generally accepted accounting principles (GAAP) as evidenced by independent financial audits with a complete audit opinion and a limited number of findings that are quickly corrected. Annual audit reports are submitted to ESE and the State auditor as required.
- The school maintains a disciplined knowledge of its future with projections of income, expense, enrollment, and trends in its educational and business environment.