Best Practices for Virtual Program Success

Edgenuity® Instructional Services partners with schools and districts across the country to provide virtual instruction and design and run virtual programs.

The following best practices are common across our most successful partners, so be sure to consider each item as you plan for your own program.
Before You Implement Your Program

**DEFINE YOUR ACADEMIC GOALS**

What are you trying to achieve by running your own virtual program? Increased flexibility for students? More offerings for advanced students? Alternative learning opportunities for students who have fallen behind? Clearly defining your goals will enable you to set the appropriate policies and ensure you have the right evaluation metrics to measure the success of your program.

Defining these goals will also help you gain an understanding of which students will be the most successful in your program. Based on that assessment, you can craft prerequisites or requirements for participation, if applicable. For example, if you are creating an honors or acceleration program, you may want to establish a minimum GPA.

If you are planning to use the program for alternative education or credit recovery, evaluating which students are more independent and organized can make a huge difference in your program’s success. Requiring students to attend an orientation meeting, take a pretest, or get a sign-off from a guidance counselor can also help ensure that students who are enrolling take their choice seriously.

**IDENTIFY SCHOOL/DISTRICT MENTOR(S)**

Selecting the right mentor(s) is integral to the success of your program. The mentor could be a guidance counselor, paraprofessional, lab facilitator, program administrator, vice principal, or a person hired specifically for this role.

Mentors partner with Edgenuity’s virtual instructors to motivate students, use data to monitor progress, and much more. The ideal mentor is innovative, flexible, energetic, and compassionate, yet tough.

**Mentors should:**

- Be invested in the program’s success
- Act as an advocate for students
- Address challenges as they arise
- Build a relationship to understand each student’s purpose, goals, learning style, and needs
- Have honest conversations with students and families about whether the program is the right fit

**DETERMINE STUDENT EXPECTATIONS**

At a minimum, you should clearly define attendance policies and how much progress is expected of students each day or week. Students and families need to understand that online courses mirror the rigor and structure of classroom learning; this is particularly important if students will be working from home without daily, face-to-face interaction with a teacher or mentor.

Your program should also define clear consequences for students failing to meet these expectations. For example, students who regularly miss one or more periods of school would expect to face some disciplinary action. Students in your virtual program should expect similar consequences if they do not regularly meet expectations.

**Consider your answers to the following questions:**

- How many days per week will students be expected to log into their course?
- How many hours each day or week should students expect to study?
- How long will students have to complete their courses?
- Do students possess the necessary communication, time management, and self-motivation skills?

**Establish additional policies and procedures:**

- What is your program’s add/drop window?
- Will students be able to start courses at any point or only at designated times in the school year?
- Will students be allowed extensions if course work is not complete by the end date?
- How many times can students retake a quiz?
- What are your passing thresholds for assessments and for the course?
- How do you define and punish cheating?
- Can students take assessments at home or only on-site?

Administrators, mentors, students, families, and our virtual teachers must all be aware of these policies in order to ensure students can be successful.
COMMIT TO PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT
Administrators, mentors, and counselors will need orientation and training on a range of topics: enrolling students, using data to monitor progress, helping students to set goals and take ownership of their learning, and more.

Professional development must be an ongoing process throughout the school year. At a minimum, staff should plan to attend an online (or on-site, if applicable) training with Edgenuity to learn more about how the systems and instructional model work. As educators get more comfortable with the program and learning management system, other workshops and support sessions may prove to be more beneficial.

PROMOTE YOUR PROGRAM
Promoting your program is an important consideration, and there are many ways for you to do this. Create flyers, write letters to students and families, and craft emails to help spread the word. Make announcements at events where large groups of students and possibly their families are present, such as back-to-school night, sporting events, and concerts.

Be sure to also explain to students and families why you are offering a virtual program. Often when presented as simply another option, people assume that virtual learning is easier than traditional learning. By tailoring your message to identify a specific reason or need for your program, you have a greater likelihood of attracting students who have a vested interest in this solution. Make sure to also clearly articulate policies up front so that students and families are aware of expectations for success from the onset.

Enroll students
You will need to decide how to enroll students in your program using either a school/district course request web page or via counselor enrollment. Edgenuity can also support you via manual enrollments if neither option works for your program. Your Edgenuity Account Manager can help you decide which option is best for you.

Host a student orientation
Even though today’s students may have grown up using technology, they may not already know how to engage in virtual learning. Require students to attend an in-person orientation to receive log-in information, understand your policies and procedures, meet the mentor, learn about time-management skills, and more. An orientation is particularly important for those students who will complete their courses at home.
After Your Program Has Been Implemented

**MONITOR DATA**

Depending on your role, you may be regularly looking at data to monitor metrics like attendance, progress, and performance. Edgenuity’s student information system (SIS) and learning management system (LMS) provide real-time access to a number of reports to help you evaluate the success of both students and your program.

Having access to this data empowers you to take any necessary steps when you uncover issues, such as individual students falling behind or groups of students underperforming in a course. Edgenuity’s virtual instructors and your Account Manager can help you find the reasons behind the issues and recommend steps to get things back on track if needed.

**Adjust as necessary**

If something isn’t working, don’t wait until the end of the term to fix it. Edgenuity’s team of partnership advisors, implementation consultants, and customer service and tech support specialists can help you diagnose and implement changes to your program in order to foster greater success.

**MONITOR OVERALL PROGRAM HEALTH**

In addition to the individual success of your students, you should also be monitoring the overall health of your program. How does your staff find the program to be working out? Are certain educators more successful than others? What do those educators have in common? Grade level? Number of students in the class? Skill level?

It’s also important to regularly check in with your staff to see what ideas they might have for improvement. Maybe more professional development or professional development delivered in a different manner can help. Or maybe you should consider opening your program up to new and/or different students.

The healthiest programs regularly monitor progress and make changes over time to better fit their student body and staff, so make sure to take the time to check in, as well as monitor data, to find opportunities for growth and improvement.

**TO GET STARTED WITH YOUR VIRTUAL PROGRAM,**

visit edgenuity.com