

This document focuses on guidance and best practices related to virtual enrollment during the COVID-19 pandemic. For more information on enrollment and attendance issues, including how to document attendance related matters, questions on instructional minutes, etc., please see the **Attendance and Enrollment FAQ** located on the [TEA Coronavirus webpage under Funding and Waivers](#).

For purposes of this document, **virtual enrollment** is defined as the enrollment of a student in a school district or charter school (school system) for the first time that does not involve in-person interaction. This document will address virtual enrollment questions for students enrolling in a school system for the current school year, 2019-2020, and students registering for enrollment for school year 2020-2021.

## Frequently Asked Questions

**1. My school system is transitioning to virtual instruction. Are we required to enroll students during the transition? *Posted April 14, 2020***

School systems must continue enrolling students even while transitioning to distance learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. Pursuant to Texas Education Code (TEC), §25.001, ***schools are required to fulfill all statutory responsibilities concerning enrollment***. Even while school buildings are closed, local education agencies (LEAs) must have a process in place for enrolling students virtually.

**2. What methods should we use during the enrollment process? *Posted April 14, 2020***

The method of enrollment is a locally driven decision. As a best practice, student enrollment could be accomplished via a district-created, secure internet portal or through a secure email process. Whichever method is used, ***your school system's process for enrollment and withdrawal should be prominently placed on your school's website*** in an easy-to-find manner for families, students, and community members.

For required documentation, school systems should consider the documents they require at the time of registration and the method they choose to receive those to facilitate enrollment for all families. As a best practice, using a secure server for parents to upload documents and complete registration paperwork may enable a LEA to receive copies and paperwork. A secure email server may be another option for some documentation. Parents may be able to mail some documents to the LEA if there is a person at the LEA available to receive. LEAs may need to consider the follow up once face-to-face registration is reinstated to view all required documents.

**3. Should my school system consider any legal issues related to enrollment? *Posted April 14, 2020***

There are no legal impediments to initial, virtual enrollment. Neither Texas Education Code (TEC), Sections 25.001 or 25.002, nor the *Student Attendance Accounting Handbook* (SAAH) contain any prohibitions regarding accepting pre- or post-enrollment documentation. Other than certified copies of birth certificates, retention of electronic enrollment documents are sufficient.

Regarding the need to retain a certified copy of an enrolled child's birth certificate, under SAAH Section 3.3.3, that requirement can be met by use of mail or other form of traditional delivery service that does not involve in-person interaction. In a case in which such a delivery method is not feasible within 30 days of enrollment, a signed note sent electronically or by mail explaining why delivery of the certified copy was not feasible in that timeframe will suffice.

Finally, as a reminder, students experiencing homelessness and students in foster care must be permitted to enroll as any other student and cannot be excluded from enrollment for lack of documentation.

**4. Are there exceptions to immunization-related records for out-of-state students enrolling during COVID-19? *Posted April 14, 2020***

As with other enrollment documents, immunization-related records and documents may be submitted electronically or by mail to enrolling schools. Please refer to the Attendance and Enrollment FAQ, under Waivers & Funding, on the TEA Coronavirus (COVID-19) Support and Guidance webpage for additional information related to immunization requirements.

**5. Would my local policies impact our school systems' ability to enroll students in a virtual environment? *Posted April 14, 2020***

School systems should review local policies to determine whether LEA policies that require in-person or physical documents might need to be amended or waived by school boards or superintendents with delegated authority to do so.

**6. My school system would like to begin registering new students for next year. What should we do to complete this task? *Posted April 14, 2020***

Follow the same procedures applicable to virtual enrollment described above.

**7. When a student withdraws and enrolls in another public school in Texas, records are requested through TReX; however, records are in the cumulative folder, and the campus is closed. How should this be handled? *NEW on April 23, 2020***

If a student is transferring from another Texas public school, the LEA will still submit a TReX request to the student's previous school or schools. The previous school should make all attempts possible to provide information in a timely manner and send all records electronically through TReX. In some cases, the previous school district will need to physically scan student record documents to complete the request. Governor Abbott's order of April 17, 2020 permits staff to enter campuses for this activity. Districts should take precautions to

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ensure the health and safety of staff while on campus. For specific guidance, please refer to **Guidance on Entering Schools during Closure** under Closure Guidance & Communications on the [TEA Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) Support and Guidance](#) webpage.

The sending LEA may want to keep track of any information they are unable to send, and follow-up with the receiving school once items are available. When requesting and sending information, LEAs can include contact information for ease of communication. The minimum required information to be sent via TREx can be found in Section 1 of the TREx Data Standards Version 4.8.1 and Section 3.4.4 of the *2019-2020 Student Attendance Accounting Handbook*.

### **School system enrollment best practice considerations**

- **School Website** – LEAs should ensure all COVID-19 related information and enrollment procedures are prominently displayed on the school’s website.
- **Online Enrollment Applications** – If utilized, school personnel should be monitoring the enrollment applications submitted online to ensure all new applicants are contacted in a timely manner.
- **Electronic Submission of Required Age and Residency Documentation** – LEAs may contact parents and request copies of age and residency documentation be submitted securely through the LEA’s online portal or via secure email. Copies may include a photo of the document. Documents should not be stored on a non-LEA device.
- **Paper Submission of Required Age and Residency Documentation** - LEAs should have an alternative method for providing enrollment forms and a process for parents to submit the forms and the required age and residency documentation to the school. Some examples may include: using the mail, a secure campus drop-box, or in-person appointments provided that all social distancing guidelines are followed.
- **School Employee Notification** – Once a student has been enrolled, notification of the new student can be sent to relevant school employees: school nurse, counselor, licensed specialist in school psychology (LSSP), assistant principal, attendance clerk, registrar, child nutrition, and technology services. Other employees may need to be contacted based on your LEA’s normal enrollment procedures.
- **Texas Records Exchange (TREx)** – If the student is transferring from another Texas public school, your LEA will still submit a TREx request to the student’s previous school. The previous school should make all attempts possible to provide documentation in a timely manner.
- **Submission of Local Enrollment Documentation After Enrollment** – At the time of initial enrollment, the LEA can communicate to parents that additional documentation may be required later. Local enrollment documents could include: shot records, social security cards, legal documents, parent/guardian identification, and out of state transcripts and withdrawal paperwork. Additional documentation may need to be collected based on your LEA’s normal enrollment procedures.

- **Virtual Orientation for New Students** - As a best practice, school systems may consider implementing virtual orientation activities for new parents and students to help with the transition to a new environment given that typical in-person orientation and activities are not allowed during this time.
- **Establish Virtual Mentor Relationships** – As a best practice, school systems may consider a system connect new students with a “mentor” student and/or teacher. This may be as part of orientation activities and could extend for several weeks to help students adjust to the new school and virtual environment. The LEA may consider providing parents with an informational sheet that includes contact information for the campus principal, assistant principal, counselor, special program coordinators, technology services and child nutrition.
- **Technology Orientation** – As a best practice, school systems may consider how to ensure a student has all the technology they need to begin online learning and are familiar with how to use all learning platforms.
- **Practices for High Schools** - For new high school students, the school system may have a counselor meet virtually with a student to review their transcript as part of the enrollment process.