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Contact Information:

Adam Emerson
850-245-9631
Adam.Emerson@fldoe.org
DPS: 2021-149

MEMORANDUM

TO: School District Superintendents
Charter School Leaders

FROM: Dakeyan C. Graham, Ph.D.
Executive Director, Office of Independent Education and Parental Choice

DATE: September 14, 2021

SUBJECT: Application for Innovative Synchronous Blended Learning and Real-time Student Assessment Pilot Program

Senate Bill 1108, passed by the 2021 Legislature and signed into law by Governor DeSantis, created the Innovative Synchronous Blended Learning and Real-Time Student Assessment Pilot Program. The purpose of this program is to develop innovative blended learning opportunities and to measure student progress on a weekly basis. Only school districts designated as academically high-performing as defined in Section (s.) 1003.621, Florida Statutes (F.S.), and charter schools and charter school networks designated as high-performing under ss. 1002.331 and 1002.332, F.S., respectively, are eligible to participate.

Innovative synchronous blended learning in this program is defined in s. 1002.334, F.S., as “a mode of learning where in-person and remote students are combined in one classroom environment where the education, instruction and engagement occurs at the same time with the teacher and other students physically present in the classroom.”

Moreover, for a given course, “students learn in part through online delivery of content and instruction with some element of student control over time, place, path or pace and in part at a traditional supervised classroom location away from home.”

The Department has created an application template for eligible high-performing public school districts and public charter schools interested in participating in this program. The Commissioner of Education may select applicants that successfully meet the following criteria:

- Applicants must develop a plan for the synchronous technological and resource design, curriculum, classroom operation, school or district management, privacy protection and teacher professional development, and at least weekly progress monitoring of real-time student performance in innovative blended learning programs.

- Applicants must present a plan to reduce achievement gaps through blended learning.
- Additionally, the statute that created the Synchronous Innovative Blended Learning pilot program also requires the following of participating schools and districts:
 - Distance learning will always be the choice of the student or the student's parent or guardian, and that a family will never be coerced to choose distance learning.
 - Participating classrooms may not be fully virtual but must, instead, have at least two-thirds of the students in a class present for in-person learning on any regularly scheduled school day.
 - Any struggling student participating in this program and who, according to progress monitoring data, is on pace to learn less than a year's content in a year's time, must return to learning in-person.
 - Any student can choose to switch learning modalities, in person or distance, on any given day, without notice and therefore, a seat must always be available for every student registered to take any participating course; however, the classroom must maintain at least two-thirds of the students for in-person learning.
 - The applicant provides all requested student-level data from participating schools to the Department upon request including, as necessary, benchmark historical data for up to three prior school years.

Only applications for synchronous innovative blended learning will be considered. Applicants that fail to meet the requirements in statute will be removed from the program. **Applications must be submitted to the Department by September 30, 2021.** Completed applications should be emailed to Adam Emerson at Adam.Emerson@fldoe.org. Emailed applications should come with the subject line, "Synchronous Innovative Blended Learning Application."

Applicants approved by the Commissioner shall receive funding based upon the number of full-time equivalent students being educated under the pilot program, as if each student were being educated full-time in person at his or her school. Lastly, this is a pilot program that runs, pursuant to statute, until July 1, 2024.

To aid eligible districts and charter schools, the Department plans to host a technical assistance webinar at 11 a.m. EDT on Friday, September 17. The webinar will have information on the application template and application process. To join the webinar, register at the following link: <https://attendee.gotowebinar.com/register/241145307900595984>.