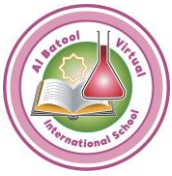# Al Batool Virtual International School And
Al Forqan Private School (Virtual American Program)

K–12 Private School

Operations and Policies

Parent Guide to Online learning

Parent Guide to Online Learning

Parents often struggle to help their children transition into online courses. They want to know: Is this the best option for my child? What can I do to help him or her succeed? Designed for parents and guardians who are new to the world of virtual learning, this guide will help you map out the factors you ought to consider before enrolling your child in an online course.

In this guide, we explore answers to the following questions

- What is online learning?
- What do students like about taking online courses?
- What challenges do students face in their online courses?
- How do you know if online learning is right for your child?
- What are the characteristics of successful online learners?
- How can you help your child prepare for online learning?
- What kinds of questions should you ask of your school or online learning provider?

Sources of guide with adaptation and permission are:

1. Michigan Virtual

   https://michiganvirtual.org/resources/guides/

2. Apex Learning Virtual School

   https://www.apexlearningvs.com/

3. Apex Learning

   https://www.apexlearning.com/

4. Accelerate Online Academy

   https://accelerate.academy/

This guide is will be updated and translated into Arabic after the approval and licensing of the National eLearning Center.
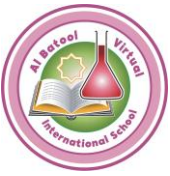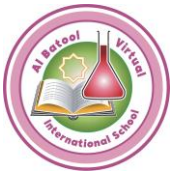
Table of Contents

About this Guide

This guide has been adapted by our schools as prepared by *Michigan Virtual*™, through its *Michigan Virtual Learning Research Institute®* (MVLRI), with the insight of experienced mentors, instructors, administrators, and customer service representatives from *Michigan Virtual*. It is intended for parents, guardians, counselors, and others who guide students in their decision about whether online courses are a good option for their personal circumstance. Its focus is on middle and high school students. In it you will find information about:

- what to consider and in what sequence;
- what to expect from your student's school, academically and financially
- what role you play in supporting your student's virtual learning success
- what a virtual course experience is like — getting started through a student's transcript
- what is different when a student is homeschooled

While the context presented here is specific to Michigan, much of the information is translatable to any parent and student considering whether and how best to learn in a virtual environment.
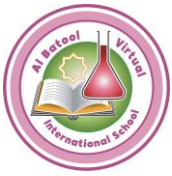
Introduction to Online Learning

An online or virtual course can be defined as a course of study that is capable of generating a credit or a grade and that is provided in an interactive learning environment where the majority of the curriculum is delivered using the Internet and in which pupils may be separated from their instructor or teacher of record by time, location, or both.

As outlined in a blog post by *Michigan Virtual Learning Research Institute*[®] (2017), online learning is being used with K-12 students to:

- Expand the range of courses available to students beyond what a single school can offer;
- Allow flexibility to students facing scheduling conflicts;
- Provide credit recovery programs for students that have failed courses and/or dropped out of school, allowing them to get back on track to graduate;
- Help students who are currently performing below grade-level to begin catching-up through blended learning;
- Personalize instruction for the needs of individual students;
- Provide on-demand online tutoring; and
- Increase the teaching of technology skills by embedding technology literacy in academic content.

Why Students Choose Online Learning

Students want to learn online for a variety of reasons. The Foundation for Blended and Online Learning (2017) published a report on why students choose blended and online schools. The report authors used surveys, focus groups, and interviews with students, along with other data to create the report. The report identified three broad reasons students pursue online and blended learning:

- Academics;
- Social-emotional health and safety; and
- Interests and life circumstances.

Students may be:

- full-time learners – taking all of their courses virtually;
- part-time learners – adding online courses to what they take at school; or

- summer learners – enriching, recovering or advancing learning during summer months.

The student's ultimate goal for completing a course significantly impacts their choices. Attention to a student's motivation for enrolling in an online course can go a long way toward eventual success. Students are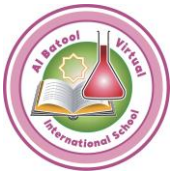 most successful when there is a genuine desire to succeed; i.e., if I pass this course, I will reach my goal of graduation, acceptance to a particular college, a desired occupation, etc. Conversely, students are more likely to fail an online course when there is little motivation; i.e., my counselor made me take this course; I don't need this credit to graduate; it doesn't matter if I pass or fail, so who cares?

Today's learning environments are changing. From the student's point of view, online learning is attractive because it is:

1. **Personalized to my needs and learning goals.** When students select their courses, they take greater ownership.
2. **Flexible so that I can try different ways to learn.** Online learning allows scheduling to accommodate health, athletic, job and family circumstances.
3. **Interactive and engaging to draw me in.** Students meet people outside their community in a safe environment, and multimedia used in online learning provides different ways of learning.
4. **Relevant to the life I'd like to lead.** Students gain more experience using the 21st century technology tools used in college and in the workplace.
5. **Paced by my own progress measured against goals I understand.** Students can move faster or slower through assignments and track their own progress toward their goals.
6. **Constantly informed by different ways of demonstrating and measuring my progress.** Educational technology can measure and share student progress quickly.
7. **Collaborative with faculty, peers, and others, unlimited by proximity.** Students can access learning materials and resources – including local, state, and national experts – using online communication tools.
8. **Responsive and supportive when I need extra help.** Communicating outside the typical school day is supported by the online learning culture. Many students – and teachers – report they spend more time interacting online than in the face-to-face classroom.
9. **Challenging but achievable, with opportunities to become an expert in an area of interest.** Online learning reinforces lifelong learning skills and promotes

information literacy and communication skills as well as thinking and problem-solving skills.

10. **Available to me as much as it is to every other student.** Online learning can direct the talents of some of the most skilled educators to the most underserved populations. A zip code does not have to determine learning options any more.

List based on previous work of Next Generation Learning Challenges
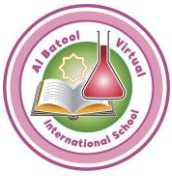
First Things First

As a parent, your role in helping your student decide if online learning is the most effective way for him/her to learn is extremely important. According to the regulations, you must give your permission for your student to take online classes. Before you agree, you want to be confident your student is well suited to learn online.

Assessing Student Readiness for Online Learning

Not all students are well prepared for online learning. When adults supporting the student can identify areas where the students are challenged, they can determine what needs to be addressed to best support students in those areas. Strategies for Online Success can assist a student in understanding how prepared she/he is for this learning option. Online courses require hard work and are not "easier" than traditional classes. The blog Are online courses "easier" than face-to-face courses? discusses five important reasons behind why they should not be easier.

In fact, they may be more time consuming because students are using a new and unfamiliar method to access the course and materials and will experience different challenges than they have with face-to-face instruction. Using the Readiness Rubric, online learners can evaluate their basic skills and competencies in the following areas:

- Technology Skills
- Work & Study Habits
- Learning Style
- Technology/Connectivity
- Time Management
- Interest/Motivation

- Reading/Writing Skills
- Support Services

Discuss with your student those areas where he/she feels less ready so you can both decide ahead of time what support is available if needed. Staying on pace during the course is a key strategy for success.

Profile of a Successful Online Learner

Once you decide your student is likely to be successful, you have additional issues to consider. Instructors with years of online teaching experience agree that students who have a successful, satisfying experience learning online share several critical characteristics. Review these characteristics and answer these questions.

- **Good Time Management:** Can your student create and maintain a study schedule throughout the semester without face-to-face interaction with a teacher?
- **Effective Communication:** Can your student ask for help, make contact with other students and the instructor online, and describe any problems she/he has with learning materials using email, text messaging and/or the telephone?
- **Independent Study Habits:** Can your student study and complete assignments without direct supervision and maintain the self-discipline to stick to a schedule?
- **Self-Motivation:** Does your student have a strong desire to learn skills, acquire knowledge, and fulfill assignments in online courses because of an educational goal? Can she/he maintain focus on that goal?
- **Academic Readiness:** Does your student have the basic reading, writing, math and computer literacy skills to succeed in the class?
- **Technologically Prepared:** Is your student prepared to use constantly evolving technology to learn? The International Society for Technology in Education (ISTE) published a set of Standards for Students designed to empower student voice and ensure that learning is a student-driven process.

Below are a few comments from students after completing their online course that reinforce the value of the critical characteristics above.

I enjoyed the interaction with classmates in the form of discussion board posts that allowed us to debate and discuss our ideas. It allowed me to share my opinions with my peers and see different sides of situations.

I really enjoyed doing the listening and speaking activities in my Japanese class. I felt like in a regular class I wouldn't get to listen to such a fluent speaker so many times. I can literally just click the repeat button and keep speaking after the speaker. In class they only say it one to two times.

I wish I had used my time wisely and used the pacing guide more. It helped me set specific due dates. I just didn't work on my class as hard as I should have.

A Special Note About Time Commitment

Experienced mentors and online instructors agree that time management is one of the skills most critical to success. Students who cannot manage time and assignments without direct supervision usually struggle to be successful learners online. Students should expect and **be able to spend five to 10 hours a week per course**.

Considerations Before You Decide

Student Related

- Consider how 1-2 hours a day per course will be balanced with your student's other commitments and life in general.
- Let your student choose the specific online course(s) whenever possible. Attention to a student's motivation for enrolling in an online course can go a long way toward eventual success.
- Discuss academic records, rubric results, and enrollment decisions with your student and school.
- Consider where your student will be working — in a designated space at school (classroom or lab, for instance) or outside class hours at home or another location.
- Consider how many online courses your student will take. If attending a full-time online cyber school or participating in a seat time waiver program, the school is required to provide a computer and Internet access.

School Support

After you and your student make some key decisions, you are prepared to talk with your student's academic advisor and/or other staff involved in the school's online program. Communication between student, parent, mentor and online instructor are critical to student success in online learning. Below are some examples of questions that may help facilitate conversations with your school about online learning options.

Student Related

Student Supports

- What kinds of training and support are provided to parents/guardians, counselors and mentors to prepare them to best support online learners?
- When enrolling to recover credit, is extra support provided from the mentor and the online instructor?
- If a student has an Individualized Education Program (IEP), how is support provided?

Enrollment

- How and when are students expected to request an online course? Is there paperwork required?
- When are the enrollment and drop deadlines?
- How will I know who the mentor is and how to contact them?

Learning Environment

- Does the school or course provider offer an orientation for parents, students, and mentor for the Learning Management System (LMS) used by the student to take the course?
- What kind of feedback and support does the online instructor provide?
- What types of assistance does the mentor provide?
- How are tests and exams handled?
- Who provides the technology and technical support needed for the course(s)?
  - Checks technology policies to ensure that firewalls are open for course websites, and pop-up blockers and add-ins do not prevent a student's ability to progress in a course.
  - Makes sure computer equipment is up-to-date and easy to access.
  - Reviews the course syllabus for any unique recommendations, such as web browser, headset for listening and recording, webcam capability, etc.
  - Determines if the student has access to a printer.

Course

- Do online courses meet academic requirements and are they approved for credit?
- Are there prerequisites for online courses? Has your student met the prerequisites?
- Does the course meet NCAA Eligibility Requirements for potential Division I and II student athletes?
- How flexible are the due dates for course assignments and tests?
- What is expected during absences from school such as holidays or closures due to weather or other emergencies?
- When can a student drop the course if he/she finds it too difficult or encounters challenges?
- How do students receive their final grades?

Parent

- What does the school expect from a parent during an online course?
- What access, if any, will a parent have to monitor student progress in a course?
- What technology and equipment, if any, should a parent provide at home?
- Do parents receive progress reports for online courses from school in the same manner as face-to-face courses?
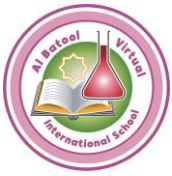
Advice for Parent/Guardian

Before class starts and until the course is completed:

- Reinforce that online courses are as important as face-to-face courses.
- Help your student establish and maintain a regular schedule for working on his/her virtual course daily.
- Review the syllabus with your student and define expectations.
- Agree on incentives and consequences.
- Set up a study space, including the technology required, and be prepared to resolve technical issues that may come up.
- Monitor your student's progress weekly.

Student Checklist

- The student has the basic computer skills needed to navigate the course and complete and submit assignments.
- The student has sufficient time in his/her schedule and understands that online courses often take as much or more time than face-to-face courses.

- The course fits in the student's academic plan and the student needs the credits.
- The student knows the course grade will become part of the academic record.
- The student has a place to work and the technology needed to submit assignments.
- The school provides a mentor or another adult to support the student's online learning and the student knows who the mentor is and how to contact him/her.
- The student knows the importance of the course syllabus and the start and end dates of the course.
- The student is able to ask for help from the online instructor and respond to the instructor via email, text, phone, or in person.
- The student has support for her or his IEP.
- You and the student know where to go for help and who can resolve technical issues.

In the end, if you decide your student is not quite ready for online learning, you can prepare him or her for a successful experience in the future.

- Build online fluencies and talk about what your student is ready for and what areas might need some work. Use the online learning readiness rubric to decide where best to focus your efforts.
- Look at course provider websites for webinars and resources directed at parents and students.
- Talk with the person at your student's school who is most familiar with online learning – your school's mentor, curriculum specialist or counselor – and ask what materials or suggestions they have to help.
- Consider enrolling in an enrichment course during summer so your student can gain confidence in learning online and you can assess his/her strengths and what skills to work on.

Get Ready for Remote Learning: Strategies for Supporting Your Child—New Content

This section is intended for parents and guardians who are guiding their child who is learning online as a result of the COVID-19 related school closures. It is intended to supplement the Parent Guide by providing necessary detail, actionable information, and resources.

Begin by asking yourself, "*How prepared am I to assist my child with learning online?*" Remember that this is a unique and temporary situation for you and your child. As a parent, you know your child best. Research supports that *relationships* and *communication* are two of the most important factors influencing online learner success. Below, you'll find suggestions for how to support your child with both, as well as other online learning best practices and ways to support your child.
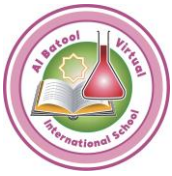
Common support strategies for online students

We'll elaborate more below, but here are some things that you, as a parent, can do to get your child ready to learn online and set up for success.

Begin by communicating with your child's school. *Do you know when classes begin? Have expectations for you and your child been communicated?* As long as your child is enrolled in a school district, it is the school that will determine what courses your child is taking and on what schedule.

Here are some strategies to get you and your child started once you have more information from your school:

- Set up a study space, including the technology required, and be prepared to resolve technical issues that may come up.
- Follow the school day and have your child commit to dedicated work time—they're more likely to do work on a daily basis as it provides a little more structure and accountability.
- Help your child establish and maintain a regular schedule for working on their virtual course daily.

- On the first day, help your child log in, see what the rules in the class are, open tabs, access the discussion board, and submit assignments—these are things they may not have done before.
- Don't wait to see if your child needs assistance—whether it's tutoring or another support service. Help your child contact the teacher if they need more help.
- Maintain a policy that you must be able to see the child's screen when he/she is taking a test.
- Establish communication guidelines with your child at the start of the course.
- Review the course schedule, plan, or syllabus with your child and discuss expectations.
- Help your child set goals to stay on pace. Review the course schedule or syllabus, pacing guide, or assignment calendar with your child often to help keep them on track.
- Be aware of and note important course dates.
- Reinforce that online courses are just as important as face-to-face courses.
- Monitor your child's progress weekly and refer to the pacing guide for the course to ensure they remain on track.
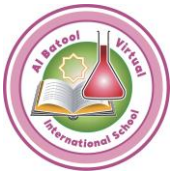- Provide motivation, encouragement, and support—this goes a long way.

Help your child get organized

The first step to getting ready for remote learning is to get organized. Set up a dedicated workspace for your child with all the materials and technology they will need throughout the day. Access the learning management system (LMS) and get comfortable navigating the course.

The LMS contains the tools a student uses to take an online course. Students gain access to, and turn in their course assignments, communicate with the instructor and other students, and keep track of their progress and grades through the LMS. The instructor will likely use the LMS to post announcements, communicate with students, provide access to graded assignments, and more.

Course navigation menus within the LMS vary from class to class or provider to provider, but they all contain similar features. The most important features are:

- **Announcements**: This is where the instructor will post important announcements about the course.
- **Course Information**: This area includes important elements, such as the course pacing guide, assignments, and the assignment and assessment calendar.

- **Instructor Information**: Look here for how to contact the instructor and other basic information about him/her.
- **Messages**: Students can communicate easily with the instructor and one another from this location.
- **Grades**: Information about grades, graded assignments with feedback, and rubrics can be found here.

It is important to have a discussion with your child about the expectations of maintaining contact with their teacher. Encourage your child to reach out to their teacher when additional help and support are needed and make sure they know how to do so.

Make sure both you and your child access the course pacing guide to understand assignment expectations and due dates. It may also be helpful to set up a calendar with this information and any required synchronous (real-time, live) learning sessions.
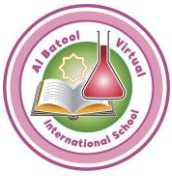
Help your child communicate and advocate

Communication is key to setting expectations with your child and maintaining efficient progress. *How often will your child share their course progress with you? If their progress is not meeting expectations, what are the consequences? How will you, as the parent or guardian, hold them more accountable for completing their work and sharing their progress?*

Just as the mentor is the face-to-face support for students when completing online coursework in a school setting, parents are the face-to-face support when students complete online coursework outside of school or at home. Educational support at home from parents is important in *any* online course, but especially when learning remotely due to the current pandemic.

It is important that parents understand the differences and similarities between online and traditional face-to-face courses. Successful online students have:

- **Good Time Management:** They are able to create and maintain a study schedule throughout the semester without face-to-face interaction with a teacher.

- **Effective Communication Skills:** They can ask for help, make contact with other students and the instructor online, and describe any problems they have with learning materials using email, text messaging, and/or the telephone.
- **Independent Study Habits:** They are able to study and complete assignments without direct supervision and maintain the self-discipline to stick to a schedule.
- **Self-Motivation:** They have a strong desire to learn skills, acquire knowledge, fulfill assignments in online courses because of an educational goal, and can maintain focus on that goal.
- **Academic Readiness:** They have the basic reading, writing, math, and computer literacy skills to succeed in an online course.
- **Technological Preparedness:** They are prepared to use constantly evolving technology to learn. The International Society for Technology in Education (ISTE) published a set of standards for students designed to empower student voice and ensure that learning is a student-driven process.

Because online courses require students to be more responsible in terms of managing their time and completing assignments, it is crucial that parents understand what is expected of students, both from their online instructor and their mentor.

Specifically, with respect to communication, parents should:

- *Provide assistance in learning to compose messages to other students and especially to their instructors.* This may be the first time your child has had to communicate in writing without the benefit of face-to-face opportunities for requesting or sharing information.
- *Show your child how to advocate for themselves.* For example, if your child reaches out to their instructor with a question via a message board entry within the course and they do not get a response, suggest your child instead ask the question in an email to the instructor. Consider copying the mentor to keep them in the loop, as well.

Help your child build relationships

Strong and supportive relationships are key to successful online learning. While much of the responsibility of building those relationships is on your child, your support and guidance on how to build those relationships is essential.

Speaking of conversations, encourage your child to communicate regularly with their teacher. Encourage your child to also communicate with students in their class and

maintain communication with their friends. Your child may feel increasingly isolated and disappointed about not attending school in-person.

It is important to also be mindful of the <u>social-emotional needs</u> of your child. In her blog post, "<u>Supporting Your Child's Social and Emotional Needs During School Closures</u>," Lauren Kazee, founder of LivingSLOW, recommends that you:

- allow time to talk about feelings with your child
- model healthy coping behaviors
- encourage responsible decision-making

In another post, she discusses and recommends that <u>parents encourage positive behaviors and self-discipline</u> with their children. These strategies, while effective in the short-term, will also be beneficial in the long-term as your child matures.

Checklist for supporting your virtual learner

Make sure to complete the checklist below:

___ I have helped my child set up a dedicated workspace

___ I have assured that my child has the necessary technology to complete their coursework and engage with their teacher and classmates
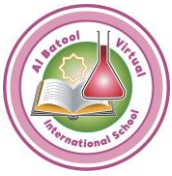
___ With my child I have set clear expectations about coursework and participation and helped them commit to dedicated work time during the day

___ I have access and reviewed the course schedule or syllabus and pacing guide (if provided) with my child

___ I have helped my child log into the LMS and their online course, and made sure they can access the course materials and resources

___ With my child, I have determined how to contact their teacher and have talked to my child about how and when to seek help

___ I am clear on the expectations the school has for my child regarding participation, course engagement, and assignment completion

___ I am ready to support my child and work with the school and teacher to ensure success
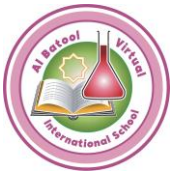
Additional parent resources

Here are some additional resources that you may find useful as you learn how you can best help your child:

ACE Framework Webinar: Drawing on current research in the field, Dr. Jered Borup presents the Adolescent Community of Engagement (ACE) framework for examining support systems in online learning environments.

The Adolescent Community of Engagement: A Framework for Research on Adolescent Online Learning: This paper describes the Adolescent Community of Engagement (ACE) framework as a lens to guide research and design in adolescent online learning environments.

Why Mentors Matter: A Conversation With Jered Borup: Why are on-site mentors so important for online students? In this article, Dr. Jered Borup, a digital learning researcher and professor at George Mason University, dives into research that supports the critical role that mentors play in highly successful online learning programs.

Conclusion

Parents are an integral partner in the team that can affect student success even though their responsibilities may be a little different in online courses. Recent research (Borup, et al., 2017) involving interviews with online teachers and school-based mentors found that teachers and mentors believed that students would most likely succeed in online courses when parents/guardians:

1. Advised students on their course enrollments;
2. Monitored student performance and progress;
3. Motivated students to more fully engage in learning activities;
4. Organized and managed student learning at home; and
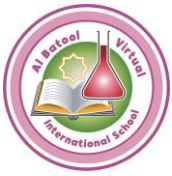5. Assisted students as they worked on assignments.

The same research suggests that online programs might see an increase in parental engagement by:

1. Involving parents/guardians in online course enrollment decisions;
2. Educating parents/guardians about learning online and how they can support their students;
3. Maintaining regular contact with parents/guardians by inviting them to be involved in specific ways; and
4. Assisting parents/guardians in keeping up on their students' academic performance by regularly providing student progress reports and offering an online parent portal, so they can easily track student engagement and performance.

Research and Resources for Online Learning Programs

For additional information and insights about online learning, please visit the following web pages on the *Michigan Virtual* website:

- The Digital Backpack blog that shares findings and expertise related to K-12 online and blended learning from both a state and national perspective.
- Research Publications that provide a foundation to examine, engage and explore educational practices in the industry.
- Research Clearinghouse contains references to important research and publications in the field of K-12 online and blended learning.

- Michigan's Online Learning Law page is dedicated to information on Michigan's 21f legislation. It includes resources and samples developed by and for schools.
- A page dedicated to Mentors began in partnership with school leaders and mentors to develop a professional learning community where they can ask questions, problem solve and share ideas with other mentors around the state including sample forms.
- The National Standards for Quality Online Programs, Teaching and Courses have been a benchmark for online learning for more than a decade. All three standards were updated and published in 2019 by Quality Matters and the Virtual Learning Leadership Alliance.
- The International Society for Technology in Education (ISTE) published Standards to provide a framework for innovation in education and help educators and education leaders worldwide prepare learners to thrive in work and life.
- Today's students must be prepared to thrive in a constantly evolving technological landscape. The ISTE Standards for Students are designed to empower student voice and ensure that learning is a student-driven process.
- Tools and samples developed to facilitate enrollment decisions:
  - Strategies for Online Success
  - Online Learner Readiness Rubric
  - Student Interview for Online Learning
  - Online Course Enrollment Request Form
  - Online Learning Agreement