



RUGGABER CREATIVES, INC.

Virtual Learning Co-Op Concept Overview

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DISCLAIMER: This Virtual Learning Co-Op Concept was developed as a support structure for the at-home, virtual learning plan created and monitored by an accredited public school system. This is NOT a complete, homeschooling curriculum and was never intended to be used as one. If you are interested in utilizing a curriculum other than that chosen by your school district, it is recommended that you contact your state's Department of Education. In order to be in compliance with Federal and State Compulsory School Attendance Law (TCA-49-6-3001), your child MUST be enrolled full time in an accredited school system. Additionally, this Concept Overview is not intended to be a business model. This is a Cooperative Agreement only and should be entered into only with an understanding of no liability for participants.



What is a Virtual Learning Co-Op and Why is it Beneficial?

The Covid-19 pandemic has necessitated virtual learning in various forms since many districts closed in March 2020. One of the primary concerns of families, students, educators, and medical professionals is the negative impact this situation has on the healthy socialization students (particularly young students) receive in a traditional school environment.

The Virtual Learning Co-Op plan outlined here was designed to provide families with an option to limit their child's exposure to large groups, as they would be in a traditional school setting, while also reaping the benefits of the social interaction had with classmates. Additionally, it can provide a virtual learning opportunity for families which struggle to provide at-home parent support and supervision due to work schedules and requirements.

For this purpose, a Co-Op is defined as a collective of families cooperating together to provide support for their childrens' education process. It may take several forms - parents could take turns hosting the 'class,' or they may designate a specific family to host the 'class.' These choices must be made on a case-by-case basis in order to make the situation work for the families involved.

Additionally, it is imperative that all participating families maintain an agreed upon level of quarantining and social distancing. This is one of the major advantages of the small Co-Op model: by limiting the number of participating families, the potential exposure to the Covid-19 virus is also limited. Of course, one can never plan for all variables, and so exposure to contagion remains possible. Co-Ops may need to quarantine from one another on occasion, but this risk should be significantly reduced by the small number of individuals involved.

Each Co-Op must have a Parent or Responsible Adult serve as the "Home Educator." This person may change from day-to-day or be one person in charge of the daily learning, depending on the needs of the Co-Op group. The Co-Op may, for example, decide to ch



switch off, with each family hosting the “class” on a different day of the week so that each family will only have to arrange for one day away from work. Alternatively, a Co-Op may designate one family’s home as the “classroom” and an adult from that family takes on the role of “Home Educator” full-time. This may be an especially attractive situation if one family has suffered an unexpected lay-off or job loss due to the pandemic.

PLEASE NOTE: This does NOT mean that the “Home Educator” is a licensed educational professional. These Co-Ops are not intended to be a daycare center or the like and would not fall under the regulations and requirements of such a place. This Co-Op model is informal and designed to be mutually beneficial.their needs.



Example Model A

Families Apple, Berry, and Cherry agree to establish a Virtual Learning Co-Op. Ms. Apple agrees to host the “class” of learners Monday and Tuesday of each week, Dr. Berry takes Wednesdays, and Mr. Cherry takes Thursdays and Fridays. This allows Ms. Apple, Dr. Berry, and Mr. Cherry each at least three days a week in which they are free to go to work. Each home has a basic pack of supplies, such as pencils, crayons, paper, rulers, etc., and the students will be set up to learn at the families’ dining tables. Students must bring all essential learning materials with them.



Example Model B

Families Ashe, Birch, and Cedar agree to establish their own Virtual Learning Co-Op, however, all parents, with the exception of Ms. Cedar, have full-time jobs that require them to be on-site. Ms. Cedar has been furloughed from her job through January. Ms. Cedar agrees to be the full-time “Home Educator” and support all of the children each day in her home. She sets up a small, designated “classroom” area in her living room. The Ashe and Birch families have agreed to pay a small fee to Ms. Cedar for her time, commitment, and use of her home, electricity, and wi-fi. Additionally, they have agreed to serve as the “substitute,” should Ms. Cedar need to take a day off. It is important to note that this model is STILL a Co-operative Agreement, not just hiring someone. All families must be invested and involved.



These two scenarios are just examples of potential Co-Op set-ups. Each group must determine for themselves what works for them. It is very important to note that the Home Educator should not be held liable for the academic progress of the participating children. Again, this is an In Good Faith cooperation undertaken within extraordinary times. Remember that we are all doing the best we can. Each Co-Op must decide for themselves what expectations they have and whether or not the situation is working. It is recommended that Co-Op Families have a twice-monthly check-in meeting to address any concerns, course correct, and plan for the immediate future. At this time, the realities of large-scale Virtual Learning through a public school district are largely unknown, as is the future situation surrounding Covid-19. Co-Ops should plan on being nimble and flexible, and so should families.

THE HOME EDUCATOR ROLE

The Home Educator is tasked with providing supervision and education support as needed. This role is critical both for safety, but also for helping to focus the students and keep them on task. Ideally, this individual would have some background in education, but that may not always be possible. They should be deeply committed to the education of ALL the students they support, not just their own student.

Additionally, the Home Educator should have a goal of providing some group-learning enrichment. Although the school district will provide the essential, standards-based curriculum, Co-Op Home Educators may provide access and guidance for some fun group, "class" projects. This is a great opportunity for enrichment.

Consider:

- Arts activities and integration
- Civic education
- Science projects
- Class gardens
- Cooking together
- STEM and STEAM activities
- Volunteering



When undertaking a Virtual Learning Co-Op, there are a few important things to consider:

SAFETY!

First and foremost, we want our kids to be safe. Co-op Leaders should have:

- Emergency contact information
- Basic medical information such as allergies and pre-existing conditions.
- A First Aid Kit with basic band-aids, antibacterial ointment (Neosporin, etc.), ice packs.
- A Smoke Detector
- A thermometer (for checking vitals each morning)

It is recommended that medication only be administered by the child's own parent/responsible adult. Students should have the right/ability to speak to their parent/responsible adult at any time. This means they should be able to connect with their families in the event they ever feel uncomfortable. Only Co-Op with families you KNOW and TRUST!

SPACE

A designated "classroom" space is important. It could be as simple as a dining room table, or as elaborate as individual desks, but it is important for students to have a designated area for their learning. This will help them focus on their online classes and help them get in the "school time" mindset.

What else should a space have?

- Electrical outlets for charging devices.
- Reliable, Password protected Wi-fi/Internet.
- An outdoor space, (even a small one!) to allow for some fresh air and exercise!
- Access to a bathroom. For ease of cleaning, a designated bathroom separate from the main family bathroom is ideal, but definitely not required.
- The "classroom" should be stocked with basic classroom supplies.
- Students should bring their tablet, headphones, notebooks, reading materials, and main pencil case with them every day.



LOGISTICS & OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

This includes the “nuts and bolts” of day-to-day classroom life.

- All transportation should be provided by the child’s own family if at all possible.
- Lunches and snacks should be packed to ensure no potential food allergy issues.
- Non-liability agreements need to be signed for the protection of everyone involved. A Co-Op should be an IN GOOD FAITH Collaboration.
- Students are responsible for their own grades.
- Pets. Since a Co-Op typically meets in a home, family pets need to be considered. How comfortable are they with kids? How comfortable are the kids with the pet? Any allergies that need to be considered?
- ALL Behavior Management methods must be agreed upon beforehand. Suggested options are calm down centers, enforced time-out, and phone calls to parents.
- To limit potential germs, the primary learning space should be cleaned on the morning of/night before. This should include the bathroom. TIP: This can be a daily activity in which the students participate! Remember how much kiddos love to be a classroom helper!
- Have a plan for potential periodic quarantines necessitated by the possible spread of Covid-19 and other viruses.

SUPPLIES

It is recommended that all Virtual Learning Co-Ops reference and follow the supplies list provided by the SCS Schools and classes, within reason.

Additionally, consider:

- Surge protectors
- Tablet holders
- Outdoor gear, such as sidewalk chalk, soccer goals, a kickball, etc.
- Thermometer and any needed covers
- Storage Crates for the student’s belongings during the day
- Reusable Water Bottles
- Toilet Paper
- Stickers/Stamps/Rewards
- Headphones for virtual learning are a must!
- Partitions. If you are planning on having the students all sit at a single table, providing some visual separation through partitioning with cardboard, etc. may be useful.



THE NECESSARY “EXTRAS”

Although we are likely to suffer significant reduction of designated school supports for the Arts, Library, and Physical Education, please do not ignore these subjects as “extra.” They are essential for the mental and physical well-being of our children. That being said, you may not have the training or equipment to make you feel up to leading a music class or demonstrating proper basketball technique. Don’t forget your in-school specialists in these subjects. SCS has also provided a list of some online resources as well.

Finally, our community has a large number of arts organizations and artists, who are suffering incredible losses in income throughout this pandemic. Reach out to them to see what supports they might have for you. Free online pilates with professional ballerinas, painting classes with amazing artists, access to music classes and more can be available for free or for a small fee. Support your local community. They are here to support you. Need some ideas? Check out www.artsmemphis.org, or email Ruggaber Creatives at ruggabercreatives@gmail.com.

Mental Health for our kids and ourselves is a big concern during this time. Take some time to meditate, reach out to your school counselor for resources, and know that there are other community organizations out there to help you, like NAMI, the National Association on Mental Illness. You can connect to our local NAMI Chapter here: <http://nami-memphis.org/>

EQUITY, DIVERSITY, AND REPRESENTATION

Although the small-scale nature of a Virtual Learning Co-Op can make ensuring representation difficult, it should always be kept in mind. We cannot ignore the damaging nature of segregation and isolation on our society and our children. Social understanding, education, and health is a primary goal of the Virtual Learning Co-Op Method as it has been developed, and we urge you to place opportunities for learning about and celebrating diversity and other cultures high on your list of goals for your Co-Op.

Ruggaber Creatives, Inc. is pleased to provide this Concept Overview as a Free PDF Download. This product was self-published on July 7, 2020.

Questions? Support, including Co-Op Planning consultations with the model designer, Amy Ruggaber, is available through Ruggaber Creatives, Inc.



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