



Student Handbook

IDEAL-NM is sponsored by:

New Mexico Public Education Department
New Mexico Department of Higher Education
New Mexico Department of Information Technology
New Mexico Learning Network

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Welcome to IDEAL-NM, New Mexico's portal to eLearning services!

Online education is an exciting new learning tool that lets you be the driver. Just as planning a trip requires you to choose which roads to follow, and when to follow them, online learning offers the same decisions—which courses to take and when to log in and work on them.

An added bonus? There are no speed limits, and it is safe to go as fast as you'd like as long as you fuel up at all the learning stations. Experience tells us your online trip will be much more productive if you obey the following traffic advisories:

- Travel every day. Don't let yourself get behind. Online courses aren't easy. Learning takes effort. Be persistent.
- Don't take shortcuts. They will shortcut your education. Remember that your future bank account (and chance to buy that really fancy car) depends on today's habits of study.
- Pay attention to the tour guides—your online teachers. They are experts who know all the best places to stop and explore, and how to get the best value for your travel dollar.
- Honk if you need help. The best online learners are those who ask questions. Let your online teachers give you personal tours. They really like that!
- Enjoy the scenery. Online learning can take you to interesting and engaging places. Your teachers have linked your coursework to different sites and learning objects designed to make your journey even better.
- Tire yourself out. The best trips are those packed with the adventures that only come from total engagement.



If you need roadside services, contact Sharon. She's our great source of assistance who can be reached at sharon.purcell@state.nm.us or 505-892-7222 ext 300.

Thanks for traveling with us. Let me know how it goes.

Virginia S. Padilla
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RULES OF THE ROAD

1. Know how it works. IDEAL-NM provides online courses to supplement the curricula offered by local schools. Students accessing IDEAL courses typically are scheduled into the regular school day of their local schools; i.e., students go to a computer lab or other school location with a computer during a set period during the day to work on the online course.

The course is taught by an online teacher who interacts personally with students via email, web conferencing tools, or phone. The online teacher may reside anywhere in the state.

The courses are asynchronous—accessible at any time during the day or night. The courses also allow self-pacing, so you can complete requirements as quickly as you would like. However, teachers may direct you to participate in group work with other students.

2. It costs money. Your school may pay that for you, or they may ask you to pay.
3. Coordinate with your school. Make sure you know who your local site coordinator is, and work closely with that person. This is the person that registers students, monitors progress, facilitates success, troubleshoots any issues that arise, and makes sure your final grade is recorded on your transcript.
4. Online courses count. They are as important as onsite courses and count toward GPA's and graduation. They factor into weekly eligibility processes required for participation in extracurricular activities.
5. Grades count, too. Grades are reported in percentages so that schools can assign a letter grade as determined by district policy. For example, a 92% may be an A in some schools and a B in other schools. Grades will be based on the teacher's assessment of student work and the degree to which the student has met course requirements. Course requirements may include:
 - Student participation, effort and completion of homework;
 - Responsibility, as reflected in timely preparation of online coursework;
 - Growth and achievement in meeting content standards;
 - Skills/knowledge gained as evidenced by performance on assignments, exams and projects.

Course requirements, including grading and assessment procedures will be available to students, parents, counselors, site facilitators and administrators at the beginning of each course. Online course instructors will identify the value of each assignment and determine student grades. Penalties and consequences for late submission of work are up to the instructor. Students, parents and school officials may request information relative to how a grade was determined and the online teacher will provide that information.

6. Get started right away. Students who immediately engage with their courses and teachers are far more likely to succeed. Don't procrastinate! Ask questions!

7. Work every day. Online courses require more self-discipline than traditional courses because there is no teacher reminding you to pay attention. Successful students log into courses every day, follow instructions, and initiate communication with online teachers. Remember that the technology records your daily "attendance" in the course—and what work you were doing.
8. Don't use the "computer ate my homework" excuse. Email copies of your homework to your site coordinator, or other onsite teacher in your building. This proves that you sent your homework, even if some techno-glitch keeps it from getting to your online teacher.
9. Follow your school's Internet Use Agreement. This is the document you sign that says you will use the Internet wisely, and that you will stay away from inappropriate sites.
10. Demonstrate proper conduct. Your district has a conduct and disciplinary code with associated rights and responsibilities. As with any classroom, online instructors will attempt to address conduct and discipline problems directly with you prior to referring you to the next level. If your instructor is unable to resolve the problem or if the infraction requires administrative notification, the instructor will contact your school site coordinator and the IDEAL-NM staff. The site coordinator will either address the problem directly or bring it to the attention of your school's administration. The site coordinator will also have the responsibility of sharing with the instructor any action taken in the situation. Local discipline codes and policies/procedures for student rights and responsibilities will be used in handling the situation. If you are experiencing a problem with your online instructor, you should talk with your site coordinator who will address the issue with the IDEAL-NM staff if necessary.

Improper conduct is defined as interfering with the teaching and learning occurring on the web site by posting profane, threatening, abusive or inappropriate language—including demeaning written or oral comments of an ethnic, sexist, or racist nature and unwanted sexual advances or intimidations—to an online teacher, staff member, or student via verbal, email, threaded discussion, chat room or other communication. Improper conduct also includes using the computer system to post inappropriate graphics or links to inappropriate web sites or "hacking" into another person's computer files for any reason.

Academic dishonesty includes breaches of academic conduct, including cheating, plagiarism, and attempts by a student to show possession of knowledge and skills he/she does not possess. These breaches can include:

- The use of non-permissible materials in any form during a quiz or examination.
- Copying the answers of another student, whether on a test, quiz or homework.
- Plagiarizing, or using someone else's work which is evaluated as the student's own work.
- Impersonating another student on any assessment.
- Helping someone else commit these infractions.

11. Don't cheat. Cheating/plagiarism is not typically much of an issue since online teachers get to know their students—and their writing styles—so well that they can spot many instances of cheating. Online course pedagogy also employs a variety of means to minimize unethical

behavior. For example, more performance-based assessments are used, as well as timed assessments. Another strategy is to do an Internet search for a string of words that may be used by students. Online teachers speak with students personally via web conferencing or phone calls to reinforce instruction and validate student ethics. IDEAL-NM staff will contact a student's site facilitator anytime that cheating is suspected. If cheating is confirmed, school officials will advise online staff regarding consequences in accordance with local school policy.

12. Withdrawal permission is required. Students may drop only at the request of the site facilitator. Students who withdraw from an online course will receive a percentage grade based on work done up to that point. The student's school will determine whether the student will receive a grade, an indication of withdrawal, or any other annotation on the student transcript.
13. Know the misconceptions about online learning. Appendix A is a must-read! You'll enjoy them!
14. IDEAL-NM follows the federal rules. Go to Appendix B for federal legislation concerning anti-discrimination/harassment, equity, FERPA (Federal Educational Rights and Privacy Act), Title VI/IX, and other civil rights legislation.

APPENDIX A

COMMON MISCONCEPTIONS ABOUT ONLINE LEARNING

Adapted from information provided by the North American Council for Online Learning (NACOL) and from *A National Primer on K-12 Online Learning* written by John F. Watson.

Misconception 1: Online learning is just a high-tech version of the old correspondence course.

Response: Most correspondence courses were not “taught” by anyone—unknown persons graded assignments and sent them back to students. Online courses are taught by highly-qualified teachers with interactive tools and instant messaging. Students typically have more one-on-one interactions with their teachers and fellow students in online courses, especially when team projects are assigned. Teachers report getting to know their students better, and students who are shy or do not think well “on their feet” tend to contribute more in online environments. Students are often actively interacting with both resources and others in online environments.

Misconception 2: Online courses are for gifted and talented students only.

Response: Online courses have worked well with students of all kinds, including at-risk students, students in urban and rural areas, those with limited English proficiency, and those with special needs. Online learning has also been used successfully as part of systemic reforms to help students who are performing below grade level in large urban school districts.

Misconception 3: Online course are easier for students than regular courses.

Response: Most online courses are not condensed or easier versions of regular courses. They are aligned to rigorous state standards. They require active participation and operate in settings under supervision of state-certified teachers, require students to take state assessment tests, have attendance policies, and have competency-based academic progress requirements in effect. They require high levels of initiative to complete.

Misconception 4: A student is more likely to cheat online.

Response: Cheating is no more prevalent online than in the classroom. In addition, there are many technological ways to deter it and track it. In many cases, the online venue and communication enables teachers to get to know their students' idiosyncrasies, skills and writing patterns much better. Teachers say that student writing has a voice and that it is often easier to spot work that is inconsistent or unlike earlier communication in online environments.

Misconception 5: Online students are isolated and therefore will be socially disadvantaged.

Response: In fact, students often engage actively both online and off as they complete assignments and socialize with other students and adults in their schools, at home, and in the community. Online

students typically take only one or two courses online, blending their learning opportunities with traditional instruction in brick-and-mortar schools.

Misconception 6: Virtual schools are about technology.

Response: Virtual schools are about curriculum and instruction for students. The "medium" is not the message because the student, instructor, content, and learning goals are key. Networks simply make it possible to provide communication, access to extended resources, and use of sound, graphics, video, text, interactivity, and other digital capabilities to strengthen instruction. Most schools have the basic technology, Web browsers, plug-in software, and access that are needed.

Misconception 7: Online teachers have easy jobs.

Response: Online teachers report that they work much harder and spend more hours online than in the classroom, but that they love it. They do not simply "move a class online" and "put up what they teach." Online instructional design, writing, management of instruction, and communicating with students can take considerable time and be quite different from what goes on inside a traditional classroom.

Misconception 8: Online learning is much cheaper than face-to-face instruction.

Response: Studies show that the total costs of online learning approximate those of traditional settings. Course development costs are higher, and the required technology must be adequate. Onsite support is an important element of student success, and is often overlooked as part of the cost equation. Teacher costs equate to those of brick and mortar schools.

Misconception 9: Online courses represent an "add-on" to already burdened school systems and teachers.

Response: Online education does not represent an "add-on." It represents an opportunity to take advantage of online resources, enable teachers to help students learn in ways that match students' needs and learning style, and transform schools. Online courses may or may not decrease costs, depending on how budgets are allocated and how online courses are integrated into instruction. Training and support of teachers is important.

Appendix B

Federal Disclaimers

Anti-Discrimination/Harassment. IDEAL-NM is committed to safeguarding the right of all participants to work and learn in an environment that is free of discrimination or harassment. Discrimination/harassment on the basis of race, color, ancestry, religion, national origin, age, sex, sexual orientation, or disability in any form will not be tolerated. All schools in the IDEAL-NM network should have an anti-discrimination policy and procedures for addressing discrimination/harassment complaints. Compliance with will be the responsibility of each participating school. Complaints should be filed with the complainant's school and the IDEAL-NM Executive Director, and should follow procedures of the policy for that school. Situations involving two or more schools will require the collaboration of administrators in each of those schools. IDEAL-NM can assist when appropriate.

Equity. IDEAL-NM is committed to an equal education for disadvantaged and underserved students, and will recommend policies and procedures to ensure that all students can take advantage of the opportunities created by the project. Schools should set a priority on recruiting disadvantaged and underserved students. Online instructors will make every effort to ensure that the content, approach, and goals of the online education courses meet their needs.

FERPA. IDEAL-NM adheres to the requirements of the Federal Educational Rights and Privacy Act, and actively pursues policies and procedures that protect the privacy of student records.

Title VI/IX and Other Equity Legislation. All schools must be in compliance with all Federal Civil Rights legislation. Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 protects people from discrimination based on race, color, or national origin in programs or activities that receive federal financial assistance. Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 insures that no person shall, on the basis of gender, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination in any federally-assisted program. In addition, state civil rights legislation will apply to IDEAL-NM courses. Compliance with all civil rights legislation will be the responsibility of each school and complaints should be filed with the complainant's school and should follow the school's grievance procedure.