Virtual Student Competitions:
With the many changes our school districts, staff, and students continue to experience during this time of Covid-19, the Ventura County Office of Education believes it is more important than ever for Ventura County student competitions to take place during the 2020-21 school year. VCOE, in partnership with event coordinators and planners from across California and beyond, will be providing virtual versions of Academic Decathlon, Mock Trial, Robotics and Science Fair during the COVID-19 school closures.

We want to continue to encourage and recognize our exceptionally talented students in their pursuit of academic excellence. In addition, these virtual events will continue to provide our students with solid work ethics and valuable life skills such as; public speaking, interview, interpersonal, and teamwork skills.

What will Virtual Student Competitions look like?
As we work to plan these upcoming events, we must take into account the many unknown circumstances that lie ahead. That said, this year’s competitions will be both familiar and a bit different. We are working hard to keep the components of each program in place. The big difference will be, instead of everyone meeting in person to compete, students, coaches, judges and parents will all be meeting virtually.

That means that our competitions will be moving to online platforms that will host registration, video conferencing, scoring and so forth. We will be much more reliant on technology to bring us together and provide us with feedback.
Virtual Student Competitions:

With the many changes our school districts, staff, and students continue to experience during this time of Covid-19, the Ventura County Office of Education believes it is more important than ever for Ventura County student competitions to take place during the 2020-21 school year. VCOE, in partnership with event coordinators and planners from across California and beyond, will be providing virtual versions of Academic Decathlon, Mock Trial, Robotics and Science Fair during the COVID-19 school closures.

We want to continue to encourage and recognize our exceptionally talented students in their pursuit of academic excellence. In addition, these virtual events will continue to provide our students with solid work ethics and valuable life skills such as; public speaking, interview, interpersonal, and teamwork skills.

What will Virtual Student Competitions look like?

As we work to plan these upcoming events, we must take into account the many unknown circumstances that lie ahead. That said, this year’s competitions will be both familiar and a bit different. We are working hard to keep the components of each program in place. The big difference will be, instead of everyone meeting in person to compete, students, coaches, judges and parents will all be meeting virtually.

That means that our competitions will be moving to online platforms that will host registration, video conferencing, scoring and so forth. We will be much more reliant on technology to bring us together and provide us with feedback.
Student Competitions Virtual Setup Guide:

One thing we know for sure is that video conferencing will play a huge roll in bringing us together. So we have prepared the following tips to help you look and perform your best.

What you will need:
- A laptop with built in webcam and microphone or a desktop computer with speakers, a webcam and microphone.
- Optional items can include a separate microphone or headset/microphone.

Test your gear:
- Familiarize yourself with the necessary equipment and software.
- Make sure that your webcam, microphone and speakers are working.
- Ensure your internet connection is stable and supports high quality live video.
- Make sure you’re not downloading anything in the background.
- Close any unnecessary web browser tabs and applications.

Location! Location! Location!
- Find a quiet, private, well-lit place, free from possible interruptions.
- Ensure that you won’t be interrupted by alerting others that you can’t be disturbed.
- Place your phone in silent mode.
- No barking dogs or yelling siblings in the background!

Create a neutral background:
- It should go without saying that this is absolutely NOT the time for your favorite virtual background or any type of filter.
- Careful attention to your background is absolutely crucial. A sloppy bedroom, cluttered home office or a kitchen table full of food, is a distraction for those you are speaking with. They will be busy analyzing your dirty laundry instead of listening to what you have to say.
- Set yourself up against a simple background, one that doesn’t clash with your shirt. With maybe a few tasteful works of art on the wall.
- Allow for a minimum of at least three feet between you and your background, so you don’t blend into the background and flatten your shot. You will look more confident with some space around you.
One thing we know for sure is that video conferencing will play a huge roll in bringing us together. So we have prepared the following tips to help you look and perform your best.

**What you will need:**
- A laptop with built in webcam and microphone or a desktop computer with speakers, a webcam and microphone.
- Optional items can include a separate microphone or headset/microphone.

**Test your gear:**
- Familiarize yourself with the necessary equipment and software.
- Make sure that your webcam, microphone and speakers are working.
- Ensure your internet connection is stable and supports high quality live video.
- Make sure you’re not downloading anything in the background.
- Close any unnecessary web browser tabs and applications.

**Location! Location! Location!**
- Find a quiet, private, well-lit place, free from possible interruptions.
- Ensure that you won’t be interrupted by alerting others that you can’t be disturbed.
- Place your phone in silent mode.
- No barking dogs or yelling siblings in the background!

**Create a neutral background:**
- It should go without saying that this is absolutely NOT the time for your favorite virtual background or any type of filter.
- Careful attention to your background is absolutely crucial. A sloppy bedroom, cluttered home office or a kitchen table full of food, is a distraction for those you are speaking with. They will be busy analyzing your dirty laundry instead of listening to what you have to say.
- Set yourself up against a simple background, one that doesn’t clash with your shirt. With maybe a few tasteful works of art on the wall.
- Allow for a minimum of at least three feet between you and your background, so you don’t blend into the background and flatten your shot. You will look more confident with some space around you.
Master your lighting:
- Get plenty of light overall so it doesn’t look like you’re hiding in the dark, but not so much light that it creates glare on eyeglasses if you wear them.
- Position two lights, if possible, at a diagonal in front of you, one a bit to your right, and one a bit to your left. Table lamps work fine.
- Use natural light where possible; if one of the above lights is a window, all the better. Avoid fluorescent bulbs or other “cool” light sources.
- Eliminate any direct backlighting, like a window behind you, and avoid light shining directly over your head.

Create the perfect shot:
- Depending on which event and what role you have in it you may be required to stand, sit, provide a head and shoulders or waist up shot or be allowed to walk around.
- If you will be at a distance from the webcam you should consider using a separate microphone.
- You will need to determine your monitor height, camera placement and your position in the shot.
Master your lighting:
- Get plenty of light overall so it doesn’t look like you’re hiding in the dark, but not so much light that it creates glare on eyeglasses if you wear them.
- Position two lights, if possible, at a diagonal in front of you, one a bit to your right, and one a bit to your left. Table lamps work fine.
- Use natural light where possible; if one of the above lights is a window, all the better. Avoid fluorescent bulbs or other “cool” light sources.
- Eliminate any direct backlighting, like a window behind you, and avoid light shining directly over your head.

Create the perfect shot:
- Depending on which event and what role you have in it you may be required to stand, sit, provide a head and shoulders or waist up shot or be allowed to walk around.
- If you will be at a distance from the webcam you should consider using a separate microphone.
- You will need to determine your monitor height, camera placement and your position in the shot.
Dress professionally:
- Dress the same as you would in-person.
- Avoid bright colors and patterns and opt for softer colors instead.
- If you are wearing a tie, wear a solid color rather than a patterned one.
- If you wear glasses, adjust the lighting in the room to reduce glare from the lenses.

Consider your body language:
- It is harder to read body language through a video, so be especially aware of your nonverbal cues.
- Eye contact is very important when you are in-person, and you want to convey that same level of connection during a video session. Here’s how:
  - Avoid the instinct to look directly at your screen while you’re speaking.
  - Instead, when you speak, you want to direct your gaze at the webcam. When you do this, your eyes are more likely to align with the other person’s eyes on the other end.
  - When you’re listening, you can look back at the screen.
- Throughout the session, keep your mood upbeat and convey optimism with your body language. One way to achieve this is to have good posture. Sit in your chair with your back straight and your shoulders open. Depending on whether you are standing or sitting, feet can be planted on the floor and hands can rest at your side, overlapping in front of you, resting on your lap or on your desk.
- When you’re listening, nod and smile when appropriate to communicate that you’re giving them your full attention. Use hand gestures when it feels appropriate and keep your movements close to your body. Avoid fidgeting or letting your gaze drift away.

Practice, practice, practice:
- Now you are ready to practice your on-screen persona.
- Schedule a test call with a friend or family member and ask them to provide you with feedback about your background, lighting, appearance, articulation and body language.
- Be aware of your computer’s tendency to lag and make sure you do not talk over the other person.
- Practice your main talking points.
- Practice listening carefully as well as speaking slowly and clearly.
- The more you practice, the more confident you will be during the actual session.

Relax, you’ve got this!
- Your worst enemy when online may be your own nerves.
- Have any necessary items ready.
- Take a deep breath before you start, remain calm and collected and remember to slow down.
- If you can communicate confidently, you are far more likely to leave a lasting positive impression than if you seem nervous.
- Remember, one of the best solutions for anxiety is practicing ahead of time.
**Dress professionally:**
- Dress the same as you would in-person.
- Avoid bright colors and patterns and opt for softer colors instead.
- If you are wearing a tie, wear a solid color rather than a patterned one.
- If you wear glasses, adjust the lighting in the room to reduce glare from the lenses.

**Consider your body language:**
- It is harder to read body language through a video, so be especially aware of your nonverbal cues.
- Eye contact is very important when you are in-person, and you want to convey that same level of connection during a video session. Here’s how:
  - Avoid the instinct to look directly at your screen while you’re speaking.
  - Instead, when you speak, you want to direct your gaze at the webcam. When you do this, your eyes are more likely to align with the other person’s eyes on the other end.
  - When you’re listening, you can look back at the screen.
- Throughout the session, keep your mood upbeat and convey optimism with your body language. One way to achieve this is to have good posture. Sit in your chair with your back straight and your shoulders open. Depending on whether you are standing or sitting, feet can be planted on the floor and hands can rest at your side, overlapping in front of you, resting on your lap or on your desk.
- When you’re listening, nod and smile when appropriate to communicate that you’re giving them your full attention. Use hand gestures when it feels appropriate and keep your movements close to your body. Avoid fidgeting or letting your gaze drift away.

**Practice, practice, practice:**
- Now you are ready to practice your on-screen persona.
- Schedule a test call with a friend or family member and ask them to provide you with feedback about your background, lighting, appearance, articulation and body language.
- Be aware of your computer's tendency to lag and make sure you do not talk over the other person.
- Practice your main talking points.
- Practice listening carefully as well as speaking slowly and clearly.
- The more you practice, the more confident you will be during the actual session.

**Relax, you've got this!**
- Your worst enemy when online may be your own nerves.
- Have any necessary items ready.
- Take a deep breath before you start, remain calm and collected and remember to slow down.
- If you can communicate confidently, you are far more likely to leave a lasting positive impression than if you seem nervous.
- Remember, one of the best solutions for anxiety is practicing ahead of time.