

STATE GUIDANCE FOR DISTANCE LEARNING

Definition

Distance learning is formal learning activity in which participants and instructors are separated by geography, time, or both for the majority of the instructional period. Distance learning materials come in a variety of media, including, but not limited to, web-based programs, print, audio recordings, videos, broadcasts, computer software, and other online technology. Instructors support distance participants using methods including, but not limited to, communication via mail, phone, e-mail, and online software, and through face-to-face instruction.

Distance Learning Participant Descriptions

A **distance learner**, for federal reporting purposes, is a participant in distance education who has more proxy contact hours than direct contact hours at the end of the program year. Distance learners are reported on NRS Table IVC: Educational Gains and Attendance for Participants in Distance Education. Distance learners are a subset of participants with proxy contact hours.

A **participant with proxy contact hours** is a participant who engages in distance learning and has completed at least one proxy contact hour. A participant with proxy contact hours will not be counted as a distance learner unless the total number of proxy contact hours exceeds the total number of direct contact hours.

A **non-distance learner** is a participant who has fewer proxy contact hours than direct contact hours or no proxy hours at all.

Testing Distance Learning Participants

Participants enrolled in distance learning classes must be tested according to the same policies and procedures as participants who are not enrolled in distance learning classes, as outlined in the Assessment Guide. All tests for distance learning participants must be administered following the publishers' guidelines.

Posttesting

All participants engaged in distance learning courses will be posttested after the same amount of instructional time as other participants, as outlined in the Assessment Guide. Both direct contact hours and proxy contact hours are counted to calculate the amount of instructional time required before posttesting. Tests must be conducted with a trained test administrator in a secure setting using only state-approved tests. More information on testing can be found in the assessment guide: <https://www.twc.texas.gov/files/agency/acl-assessment-guide-twc.pdf>.

Requirement for Direct Contact Hours

Participants in distance learning must have at least 12 hours of direct contact before they can be counted for federal reporting purposes. Direct contact hours involve interaction between the participant and program staff in real time. Direct contact hours can be a combination of direct face-to-face contact as well as contact through phone, video, teleconference, or online communication in which the identity of the participant and the amount of time expended on the activity can be verified. Live online discussions, telephone conference calls, and live video broadcasts to remote locations are examples of direct contact hours that are countable under this definition.

Proxy Contact Hours

In addition to direct contact hours, programs may also report proxy contact hours to track time participants spend in distance learning activities. Proxy contact hours differ from direct contact hours in that the identity of the participant and/or the exact amount of time spent on a learning activity cannot always be verified. Proxy contact hours are tied to an approved curriculum for distance learning and are entered into TEAMS separately from direct contact hours. All proxy contact hours must be documented using the method described by the approved distance learning curriculum.

Distance Learning Curriculum Models

To determine a participant's proxy contact hours, a program must use an approved distance learning curriculum that employs one of the following models:

1. *Clock Time Model*: Assigns proxy contact hours based on the time that a participant is connected to or engaged in an online or stand-alone software program that tracks time.

Clock time model curricula electronically track the time the participant spends interacting with instructional material and stops counting idle time after a preset period of inactivity.

2. *Teacher Certification Model*: Assigns a predetermined number of proxy contact hours for each activity completed at an acceptable level of quality, as verified by the instructor.

Proxy contact hours for teacher certification model curricula are awarded based on the teacher's certification of participant's completion of assignments. Teachers may award full proxy hour credit if the assignment is completed and demonstrates competence in the teacher's professional judgment. Teachers may award half of the full proxy hour credit if the assignment is only partially completed but still demonstrates competence in the teacher's professional judgment. Assignments that do not demonstrate competence must be resubmitted by the participants to be counted for proxy hour credit.

3. *Learner Mastery Model*: Assigns a predetermined number of proxy contact hours based on learner mastery of each lesson or unit in the distance curriculum.

Proxy contact hours for learner mastery model curricula are awarded based on a passing score on a content test for a particular assignment, lesson, or unit. The passing rate is set at a minimum of 70 percent unless otherwise recommended during the curriculum approval process.

Distance Learning Provider Curriculum Approval Process

Each distance learning curriculum must be approved by TWC before implementation and before proxy contact hours can be reported. The List of Distance Learning Curricula Authorized to Enter Proxy Hours in TEAMS, with associated models used for calculating proxy contact hours, is posted on the Texas Center for the Advancement of Literacy and Learning's website at <http://www-tcall.tamu.edu/twcael/initiatives/distcurriculum.html>.

Provider curricula for which proxy contact hours are to be calculated must first meet criteria established by TWC. Curriculum providers must certify that their products meet these criteria by submitting a [Distance Learning Curriculum Survey](https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/DLcurriculumsurvey) at <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/DLcurriculumsurvey>. Once the survey is received and accepted by TWC, it is forwarded to the Distance Learning Curriculum Approval Committee for further approval. This may include contacting the vendor to set up a demonstration or other activity as determined by the Committee. Once the Committee has approved, the distance learning curriculum is added to the List of Approved Distance Learning Curricula and available for entry of proxy hours into TEAMS

Distance learning curricula that employ the clock time model must stop counting time after a specified number of idle minutes. TWC will approve the number of minutes that is allowed before the program stops counting time.

Approval for distance learning curricula that employ teacher certification and learner mastery models may require a pilot to determine recommendations for the number of proxy contact hours that can be awarded to distance learning participants.

Entering Distance Learning Classes and Hours in the Data Management System

All required NRS data elements must be recorded in TEAMS for distance learners and participants with proxy contact hours. For data to be reported on NRS Table IV or Table IVC, 12 or more direct contact hours and a test are required.

When creating a distance learning class in TEAMS, it is necessary to identify the curriculum and the model used for calculating proxy contact hours. Once identified as a distance learning class in TEAMS, participants can be assigned, and both direct contact hours and proxy contact hours can be recorded.

If curricula following the teacher certification model or learner mastery model are deployed, direct contact hours may not be counted for lessons or activities taken directly from the content of the curriculum, since total proxy contact hours are preassigned for these lessons or activities. However, any direct contact hours for activities outside the curriculum may still be counted, including registration, posttesting, and instruction that is supplemental to the distance learning curriculum.

Reporting Instructional Hours

Providers must report all instructional hours in TEAMS. Classes that have been identified as distance learning classes in TEAMS will permit programs to record proxy contact hours and direct contact hours separately.

Distance Learning Program Plan

All AEL providers offering distance learning classes must develop and maintain a distance learning plan, which must be available for review at TWC's request. Providers may have a single plan that includes subcontractors and partner agencies, or they may oversee multiple program plans that consortium members and subcontractors develop themselves.

The distance learning plan is first developed during participation in Module 3 of the Distance Learning Academy. Program leadership must maintain the plan, with revisions as necessary, to accommodate changes in the delivery of distance courses, including the addition of new distance learning curricula, new sites, new technology, and/or new distance learning providers. A copy of the DL Plan can be found on the TCALL website here:

https://tcall.tamu.edu/twcael/initiatives/pdf/DistanceLearningPlan_2020.pdf.

Required Training for Distance Learning Staff

As a part of the PD requirements outlined in the Staff Qualifications, Training, and Development Requirements section (<https://tcall.tamu.edu/twcael/AELStaffQualifications.htm>), Module 1 of the Distance Learning Academy is required for key administrative staff, teachers, and support staff members who are engaged in distance learning, including any instructor assigned to a class that reports proxy contact hours in TEAMS.

Module 1 is an introductory course that explains the state guidance for distance learning in Texas and how distance learning is tracked, documented, and entered into TEAMS. Module 1 must be completed before engaging in distance education.

Module 2 of the Distance Learning Academy is not required but is highly recommended before selecting an approved distance learning curriculum.

Module 3, D-Learning in Texas, covers best practices for developing and implementing a distance learning program that is specific to the needs of AEL customers. By the end of Module 3, participants will have completed either a detailed analysis of their current distance learning plan or a draft of a new plan. Module 3 is required for all Distance Learning Leads or others who develop, modify or are otherwise responsible for the DL Plan.

Distance Learning and TEAMS is Module 4 of the DL Academy and is recommended for all staff who collect, enter, or use DL reports and remit proxy hours into TEAMS.

Questions or concerns regarding the Distance Learning Policy should be relayed to aeldistancelearning@twc.state.tx.us.

Questions or concerns about the Distance Learning Academy should be addressed to pdportal@tamu.edu.