STATE GUIDANCE FOR DISTANCE LEARNING

DEFINITION

Distance learning is formal learning activity where 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 through various methods, including, but not limited to, communication via mail, phone, e-mail, online and software, or 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 hours than direct 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 hours.

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

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

TESTING OF 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 this Assessment Guide. All tests for distance learning participants shall be administered face-to-face following the publishers' guidelines.

POST-TESTING

All participants engaged in distance learning courses will be post-tested after the same amount of instructional time as other participants, according to the approved Assessment Guide. Both direct contact hours and proxy contact hours are counted to calculate the amount of instructional time required for progress testing. Participants must appear in person at a proctored program site for pretest and any subsequent post-tests. Tests must be conducted through face-to-face interaction with a trained test administrator in a secure setting using only state-approved tests.

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 hours to track time participants spend on distance learning activities. Proxy 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 hours are tied to an approved curriculum for distance learning and are entered into TEAMS separately from direct hours. All proxy hours must be documented using the method described by the approved distance learning curriculum.

DISTANCE LEARNING CURRICULUM MODELS

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

1.	*Clock Time Model*: Assigns proxy 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 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 pre-determined number of proxy hours for each activity completed at an acceptable level of quality, as verified by the instructor

Proxy 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. Assignments that do not demonstrate competence must be resubmitted by the participants in order to be counted for proxy hour time.

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

Proxy hours for Learner Mastery Model curricula are awarded based on a passing score on a test of content for a particular assignment, lesson, or unit. The passing rate will be set at a minimum of 70% 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 hours can be reported. The *Approved List of Distance Curricula for Texas Adult Education* with associated models used for calculating proxy hours is posted on the Texas Center for the Advancement of Literacy and Learning's website.

Provider curricula for which proxy 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 document entitled *Certification of Distance Learning Curriculum*. In addition, distance learning curriculum providers must complete the *Distance Learning Curriculum Survey.* Once the certification and survey are received and accepted by TWC, the distance learning curriculum is added to the *Approved List of Distance Curricula for Texas Adult Education*.

Distance learning curricula that employ the *Clock Time Model* must stop counting time after a specified number of minutes of idle time. 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 hours that can be awarded to distance learning participants.

ENTERING CLASSES AND HOURS IN THE DATA MANAGEMENT SYSTEM

All of the required NRS data elements will be recorded in TEAMS for distance learners and participants with proxy hours. For data to be reported on NRS Table IV or Table IVC, 12 or more direct contact hours and a baseline 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 hours. Once identified as a distance learning class in TEAMS, participants can be assigned, and both direct hours and proxy 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 hours have already been pre-assigned for these lessons or activities. However, any direct contact hours for activities outside the curriculum may still be counted, including registration, post testing, or face-to-face instruction that is supplemental to the distance learning curriculum.

Reporting Instructional Hours

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

DISTANCE LEARNING PROGRAM PLAN

All AEL providers offering distance learning classes will develop and maintain a Distance Learning Plan, which must be available for review at the request of TWC. An AEL providers may have a single plan that includes subcontractors and partner agencies, or it 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 needed, 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.

REQUIRED TRAINING FOR DL STAFF

In addition to professional development requirements outlined in *Staff Qualifications, Training, and Development*, Modules 1 and 3 of the DL Academy are required for key administrative staff, teachers, and support staff who are engaged in distance learning, including any instructor assigned to a class that reports proxy hours in TEAMS. Module 2 of the DL Academy is not required but is highly recommended prior to selecting an approved distance learning curriculum.

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 prior to engaging in distance education.

Module 3 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 agency distance learning plan or a draft of a new agency plan.