

State Policy Document for Distance Education

1. **Definition.** Distance education is formal learning activity where students and instructors are separated by geography, time or both for the majority of the instructional period. Distance learning materials are in a variety of media including but not limited to print, audio recording, videotape, broadcasts, computer software, web-based programs and other online technology. Teachers support distance learners through the following to include but not limited to: communication via mail, telephone, e-mail, online technologies and software, or face to face instruction.
2. **Distance Learning Program Plan.** All programs offering distance education classes will have a current Distance Learning Agency Plan on file at TWC Adult Education and Literacy. The agency plan is written during participation in Module 3 of the Distance Learning Academy.
3. **Requirement for Direct Contact Hours.** Students in distance education must have at least 12 hours of direct contact with the program before they can be counted for federal reporting purposes. Direct contact hours involve interaction between the learner and program staff. This can be a combination of direct face-to-face contact as well as contact through telephone, video, teleconference or online communication, in which the identity of the learner can be verified. Live online discussions, telephone conference calls, monitored labs and live video broadcast to remote locations are examples of direct contact hours that are countable under this definition.
4. **Proxy Contact Hours.** In addition to direct contact hours, programs may also report proxy hours to track time students spend on distance learning activities. Proxy hours differ from direct contact hours in that the identity of the learner and/or the exact amount of time spent on a learning activity cannot always be verified directly.
5. **Distinction between a Distance Education Participant and a Participant with Proxy Hours.** For a student to be counted as a distance education participant in a program year, the preponderant amount of instruction must be delivered through distance education. A distance education participant is a student who has more proxy hours than direct hours. NRS Table IVC reports distance education participants.

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

6. **Distance Education Models:** In order to determine a learner's proxy hours a program must use an approved distance education curriculum and one of the following models:
 - *Clock Time Model:* Assigns proxy hours based on the time that a learner is connected to or engaged in an online or stand-alone software program that tracks time.
 - *Teacher Certification Model:* Assigns a fixed number of proxy hours for each activity in a distance curriculum based on teacher verification of the extent to which a learner engaged in or completed the assignment.
 - *Learner Mastery Model:* Assigns a fixed number of proxy hours based on learner mastery of each lesson in the distance curriculum as demonstrated by passing a test with a high percentage (usually 70% to 80%) of correct answers.
7. **Curriculum:** A list of approved curricula and the associated model used for calculating proxy hours will be posted on the Distance Learning Initiative page of the Texas Center for the Advancement of Literacy and Learning (TCALL) website.

Each curriculum employed for distance education delivery must be approved by the state office before using and before proxy hours can be reported.

Each new curriculum for which proxy hours potentially are to be calculated must be reviewed and approved by the state office and a committee consisting of no fewer than three instructors who have used it in situations where student time and outcomes are closely monitored. Reviews for curricula using the teacher certification and mastery models must identify recommendations for assigning proxy hours, based on actual experience, for specific activities assigned or units mastered. These recommendations may be reported as a range of hours, taking into account learning differences for different populations. Recommendations for proxy hours will be reviewed each year for at least two years after the curriculum has been implemented to verify that the original recommendations are in line with field experience.

Please note:

- Proxy hours calculated through the *Clock Time Model* must utilize curricula that electronically track time the student spends interacting with instructional material and disconnects after a preset period of inactivity.
 - Proxy hours calculated through the *Teacher Certification Model* and the *Learner Mastery Model* must adhere to reasonable estimates of time necessary to complete assignments or lessons, as pre-determined by teachers or staff with knowledge of the curriculum.
8. **Assessment:** All students engaged in distance education courses will be post-tested after the same amount of instructional time, as other students, according to the approved state assessment policy. Both direct contact hours and proxy contact hours are counted to calculate the amount of instructional time. Students must appear in person at a proctored program site for baseline tests and any subsequent posttests. Assessments must be conducted through face-to-face interaction with a trained test administrator in a secure setting using only state and NRS approved assessments.
9. **Registration and Assignment:** All of the required NRS data elements will be recorded in TEAMS for distance education participants and participants with proxy hours. For data to be reported on NRS Table IV or Table IVC, 12 or more direct hours and a baseline assessment are required.

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

Proxy hours in the *Clock Time Model* are tracked electronically.

Proxy hours in the *Teacher Certification Model* are awarded for various activities completed by the participant and verified by the instructor. These proxy hours are pre-determined for each activity.

Proxy hours in the *Learner Mastery Model* are awarded when the students passes a test demonstrating mastery of the course content. These proxy hours are pre-determined.

If the *Teacher Certification* or *Learner Mastery* model is chosen, any direct contact hours of instruction from the same curriculum may not be counted since total proxy hours have already been assigned. However, any direct contact hours for registration, orientation, assessment, or instruction that are not part of the distance curriculum may still be counted.

10. **Reporting Hours:** Programs will report all instructional hours into the state data base (TEAMS). Classes that have been identified as distance education classes in TEAMS will permit programs to record proxy hours and direct hours separately.
11. **Professional Development.** Teachers and administrators planning to offer distance education for the first time will participate in professional development designed to ensure successful program implementation.
12. **Required and Other Training**
 - Distance Learning Academy, Modules 1 and 3 are required.
 - During participation in Module 3, teachers and administrators will write a distance learning agency plan. This plan must be submitted and on file at TWC Adult Education and Literacy before programs begin implementing distance education classes.
 - Other professional development activities for distance education teachers and program administrators based on needs assessments.
 - For information on training in Distance Learning, contact TWC Adult Education and Literacy AdultEducation@twc.state.tx.us.

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