5-O-A: VIRTUAL LEARNING, DISTANCE LEARNING, & INDEPENDENT STUDY

**Virtual learning** is a method of receiving academic instruction in courses in which the pupil is registered and the courses are taken through a computer-based internet-connected learning environment. Virtual learning may be offered at a supervised school facility during the day as a scheduled class period or through self-scheduled learning where pupils have some control over the time, location, and pace of their education. Virtual learning includes, but is not limited to, online learning and computer-based learning, where the delivery of instruction may incorporate a combination of software, technology, and the Internet.

**Distance learning** is a method of receiving synchronous academic instruction in courses for which the pupil is registered, via a two-way communication between the teacher of record and a group of pupils.

**Independent study** is a type of learning experience that is academic in nature that allows the pupil an opportunity for self-directed learning.

**A) Requirements for Counting in Membership**

All of the following requirements must be met for pupils enrolled in virtual learning, distance learning, or independent study to count for membership purposes.

1) The pupil must meet pupil membership eligibility requirements pursuant to Section 6 of the State School Aid Act (MCL 388.1606).

2) The pupil must be enrolled and attending on the count day(s) if membership is being claimed pursuant to Section 6(8) and Section 6a of the State School Aid Act (MCL 388.1606 and MCL 388.1606a). Pupils enrolled in self-scheduled courses that take place off-site satisfy the attendance requirement for the off-site self-scheduled course by attending an on-site course in which they are concurrently enrolled on the count day(s).

3) The pupil must be enrolled in the course and the course must be reflected on the pupil’s class schedule on count day.

4) The course must be academic in nature and must be approved by the board of education of the school district or board of directors of the public school academy.

5) The course must generate credit toward the pupil’s high school diploma or grade progression.

6) The course counts as one course on the pupil’s class schedule.

7) The course generates an amount of FTE that is comparable to what it would generate if being offered through a traditional format.

8) The teacher of record must be identified. A second teacher, who does not necessarily hold Michigan teacher certification, may be associated with a distance learning or virtual course.

9) An on-site mentor must be assigned and available for assistance to the pupil. The on-site mentor monitors the pupil’s progress in the course. The on-site mentor must be a certified teacher employed by the school district. The on-site mentor may also be the teacher of record for the course.

10) If the course is offered using a blended learning format, the pupil must be physically in attendance on the count day as required by Section 6(8) of the State School Aid Act (MCL 388.1606). For a pupil who is absent on count day, the attendance criteria can be considered met if the pupil returns to school within 10 school days of an unexcused absence.
or within 30 calendar days of an excused absence.

11) Grade Eligibility:
   a. Virtual learning
      • Virtual learning, on-site with an adult present other than a certified teacher: K-12*
      • Virtual learning, self-scheduled: K-12*
      • Virtual learning, on-site with a certified teacher of record in the classroom: K-12
   *Note: Online courses offered to pupils enrolled in grades 6-12, in which the pupils are separated from their teachers by time or location, or both, that meet the requirements of Section 21f of the State School Aid Act (MCL 388.1621f), shall be provided following the legislation for expanded online learning as described in Section 5-O-D of the Pupil Accounting Manual.
   b. Distance learning: K-12
   c. Independent study: 9-12

12) Number of courses allowed per count without a seat time waiver (see Section 5-O-B), or as described in Section 5-O-D:
   a. No more than a total of two of any combination of the following:
      • Virtual learning, on-site with an adult present other than a certified teacher
      • Virtual learning, self-scheduled
      • Independent study
   b. No limit on the following:
      • Virtual learning, on-site with a certified teacher of record in the classroom
      • Distance learning

B) Intermediate District, Local District, and Public School Academy Requirements

The program shall be approved by the intermediate school district’s board of education, by the local school district’s board of education, or by the public school academy’s board of directors, for awarding credit according to the requirements of the Michigan Merit Curriculum.

In addition, some or all of the following instructional components may be required depending on the course delivery method:

Instructional Components

Teacher of Record: The teacher of record may provide instruction, administer tests and quizzes, evaluate pupil performance, and assign grades.

On-site Mentor: An on-site mentor must be assigned and available to the pupil for assistance and to monitor the pupil’s progress. An on-site mentor is required for courses delivered in a self-scheduled format, as well as online courses taken on-site with only an adult present other than a certified teacher.

Two-way Interaction: Two-way interaction is the communication that occurs between the pupil and on-site mentor, where one party initiates communication and that communication is followed by a response to that communication by the other party. This interaction may occur through, but is not limited to, means such as e-mail, telephone, face-to-face, or
instant messaging. All two-way interaction must be documented and such documentation must be available to the pupil accounting auditor upon request. Interaction must be relevant to the pupil’s course.

B) Virtual Learning

1) Virtual learning, online learning, or computer courses offered on-site with a certified teacher present as defined in Administrative Rule 340.11. These courses are provided during the school day as part of the pupil’s class schedule. The course is approved by the board of education of the school district or board of directors of the public school academy-and generates credit toward the pupil’s high school diploma or grade progression. A certified teacher of record is present in the classroom while the course is in session. A certified teacher is assigned to the course to serve as the on-site mentor. The certified teacher of record and certified on-site mentor can be the same certified teacher. There is no limit on the number of computer or Internet courses that can be counted in membership for the pupil. The course shall be counted in the same manner as any other in-school course.

2) Virtual learning, online learning, or computer courses offered on-site with an adult present who is not a certified teacher, and a certified teacher assigned as the mentor as defined in Administrative Rule 340.11. These courses are provided during the school day as part of the pupil’s class schedule. The pupil is in regular daily attendance on-site at a district building pursuant to section 6(8) of the State School Aid Act (MCL 388.1606). The course is approved by the board of education of the school district or board of directors of the public school academy-and generates credit toward the pupil’s high school diploma or grade progression. The course is supervised by an adult who is in the classroom while the course is in session. A certified teacher employed by the district must be assigned to the pupils as the mentor teacher. The pupil is limited to no more than 2 computer or Internet courses taken on-site with an adult present who is not a certified teacher. The course is counted in the same manner as any other in-school course. Effective February 12, 2014, districts offering online courses that fall into this type of virtual learning should refer to Section 5-O-D of this manual.

3) Self-scheduled virtual learning courses as defined in Administrative Rule 340.11. These courses are approved by the board of education of the school district or board of directors of the public school academy and generate credit toward the pupil’s high school diploma or grade progression. The teacher of record is identified and an on-site mentor is assigned to the pupil. The on-site mentor is available for assistance to the pupil and monitors the pupil’s progress in the course. The on-site mentor is a certified teacher employed by the school district. Each course counts as 1 course on the pupil’s class schedule and generates that portion of a full-time equivalency membership that a comparable course offered by the district would generate. Not more than 2 of these courses may be used in the computation of a full-time equivalency on each of the count days. The district may adopt additional requirements for pupils enrolled in these courses. Effective February 12, 2014, districts offering online courses that fall into this type of virtual learning should refer to Section 5-O-D of this manual.

C) Distance learning

Distance learning, as defined in Administrative Rule 340.11, is provided via 2-way communication between the teacher of record and a group of pupils over a computer or television monitor even though the teacher might be physically located in a different location than the pupils. The course is approved by the board of education of the school district or board of directors of the public school academy and generates credit toward the pupil’s high school diploma or grade progression. A pupil and certified teacher are assigned to the distance-
learning course during the regular school day. The course appears on the pupil's class schedule and an adult is present in the classroom. If the distance-learning course is provided through a cooperative agreement with another district or other district(s), the certified teacher shall be an employee of a school district that is part of the cooperative agreement. There is no limit on the number of distance learning courses that can be counted in membership for the pupil. The course is counted in the same manner as any other in-school course.

D) Independent Study

Independent study courses, as defined in Administrative Rule 340.12, are learning experiences that are academic in nature that allow a pupil enrolled in grades 9-12 the opportunity for self-directed learning. These courses may be offered in an online or virtual format. An independent study course appears on the pupil's class schedule and the teacher of record is identified. The pupil is concurrently enrolled in and attending at least one course offered by the district in which credit is earned and regular daily attendance is required. The pupil is enrolled in the course on the pupil membership count day or the supplemental count day. The course is counted in the same manner as any other in-district course. A pupil is limited to two independent study courses per count.

E) Blended Learning

This type of learning is a hybrid of instruction that takes place in part at a supervised school facility (or a location agreed upon by the district and pupil) and in part through a computer-based or internet-connected learning environment and that provides pupils with some degree of control over time, location, and pace of instruction. Pupils receive at least fifty percent of the course instructional time through on-site face-to-face instruction.

Only independent study and self-scheduled virtual learning courses are eligible for blended learning under Section 5-O-A of the manual.

F) Statutory and Other References

State School Aid Act: Administrative Rules:
MCL 388.1606 R 340.11
MCL 388.1621f R 340.12
MCL 388.1622f

G) Question and Answer

Limitation on Counting Virtual Learning Classes

Q #1 Both self-scheduled and independent study course requirements limit a pupil to two virtual learning classes and state that the pupil must be enrolled and attending the district for at least one class concurrently. What does concurrently mean?

A #1 Concurrently means a pupil must be enrolled and in regular daily attendance in at least one class at the school site during the semester or trimester that the pupil is doing the self-scheduled virtual course or the independent study if the district is counting that virtual course or the independent study course toward that pupil’s FTE.

Q #2 If the pupil is taking three virtual learning classes, in how many traditional classes must the pupil enroll for the classes to count toward FTE?

A #2 Assuming that no more than 2 of the virtual learning courses were self-scheduled
and off-site, the pupil needs to be enrolled in 1 concurrent course at the school for membership purposes. The concurrent course can be a virtual course taken at the school. If the pupil is taking more than 2 off-site, self-scheduled courses, a seat time waiver is required.

Depending on the course type, there may be a limit on the number of courses that can be counted toward membership. Refer to Section A, requirement 12 above for details.

**Charging the Pupil Online Fees**

**Q #3** A nonresident pupil is short credits for graduation and would like to graduate with her class. The pupil is taking a full class load during the day at her resident district. The resident district is counting the pupil for 1.0 FTE. The nonresident pupil is enrolled in our adult education program for an online course in the evening to earn additional credit. May our district charge the pupil the fee for the online course?

**A #3** Yes. The pupil is enrolled and taking a full course load during the normal school day; thus, the pupil cannot generate any more state aid. The nonresident pupil may be charged tuition and necessary fees.

**Q #4** The pupil takes an online course through Michigan Virtual University during the regular school day. The pupil also would like to receive college credit under dual enrollment for this course. There is an additional $25 fee to take the exam for college credit. May the district charge this fee to the pupil? Can the district deny the pupil the option of taking the exam at the district’s expense?

**A #4** No, the $25 fee falls under the “tuition and fees” for which the district is responsible under dual enrollment requirements—and the district cannot deny the pupil the opportunity to take the assessment at the district’s expense.