Policy 6158: Independent Study

Status: ADOPTED

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The Governing Board authorizes independent study as an optional alternative instructional strategy for students whose needs may be best met through study outside of the regular classroom setting. Independent study shall offer a means of individualizing the educational plan to serve students who desire a more challenging educational experience, whose health or other personal circumstances make classroom attendance difficult, who are unable to access course(s) due to scheduling problems, and/or who need to make up credits or fill gaps in their learning. As necessary to meet student needs, independent study may be offered for short- or long-term placements, on a full-time or part-time basis, and/or in conjunction with part- or full-time classroom study.

The Board shall hold a public hearing when considering the scope of its existing or prospective use of independent study as an instructional strategy, its purposes in authorizing independent study, and factors bearing specifically on the maximum realistic lengths of assignments and acceptable number of missed assignments for specific populations of students or adult education students. (Education Code 51747; 5 CCR 11701)

The Superintendent or designee may provide a variety of independent study opportunities, including, but not limited to, through a program or class within a comprehensive school, an alternative school or program of choice, a charter school, and an online course.

Student participation in independent study shall be voluntary and no student shall be required to participate. (Education Code 51747, 51749.5, 51749.6)

Independent study for each student shall be under the general supervision of a district employee who possesses a valid certification document pursuant to Education Code 44865 or an emergency credential pursuant to Education Code 44300. Students' independent study shall be coordinated, evaluated, and documented, as prescribed by law and reflected in the accompanying administrative regulation. (Education Code 51747.5)

The minimum period of time for any independent study option shall be three consecutive school days. (Education Code 46300)

General Independent Study Requirements

The Superintendent or designee may offer and approve independent study for an individual student upon determining that the student is prepared to meet the district's requirements for participation and is likely to succeed as well as or better than the student would in the regular classroom setting.

The minimum instructional minutes shall be the same for all students at each school including students participating in independent study, except as otherwise permitted by law. (Education Code 46100)

Because excessive leniency in the duration of independent study assignments may result in a student falling behind peers and increase the risk of dropping out of school, independent study assignments shall be completed no more than one week after assigned for all grade levels and types of programs. When necessary, based on the specific circumstances of the student's approved program, the Superintendent or designee may allow for a longer period of time between the date an assignment is made and when it is due. However, in no event shall the due date of an assignment be extended beyond the termination date specified in the student's written agreement.

An evaluation shall be conducted to determine whether it is in a student's best interest to remain in independent study whenever the student fails to make satisfactory educational progress and/or misses three assignments. Satisfactory educational progress shall be determined based on all of the following indicators: (Education Code 51747)

1. The student's achievement and engagement in the independent study program, as indicated by the student's performance on applicable student-level measures of student achievement and engagement specified in Education Code 52060.
2. The completion of assignments, assessments, or other indicators that evidence that the student is working on assignments.
3. Learning of required concepts, as determined by the supervising teacher.
4. Progress towards successful completion of the course of study or individual course, as determined by the

supervising teacher.

The Superintendent or designee shall ensure that students participating in independent study are provided with content aligned to grade level standards at a level of quality and intellectual challenge substantially equivalent to in-person instruction. For high schools, this shall include access to all courses offered by the district for graduation and approved by the University of California (UC) or the California State University (CSU) as creditable under the A-G admissions criteria. (Education Code 51747)

The Superintendent or designee shall ensure that all students participating in independent study for 15 school days or more receive the following throughout the school year: (Education Code 51747)

1. For students in grades transitional kindergarten, kindergarten, and grades 1 to 3, opportunities for daily synchronous instruction.
2. For students in grades 4-8, opportunities for both daily live interaction and at least weekly synchronous instruction.
3. For students in grades 9-12, opportunities for at least weekly synchronous instruction.

The Superintendent or designee shall ensure that procedures for tiered reengagement strategies are used for all students participating in an independent study program for 15 school days or more who are: (Education Code 51747)

1. Not generating attendance for more than ten percent of required minimum instructional time over four continuous weeks of the district's approved instructional calendar.
2. Not participating in synchronous instructional offerings pursuant to Education Code 51747.5 for more than 50 percent of the scheduled times of synchronous instruction in a school month as applicable by grade span.
3. In violation of their written agreement.

Tiered reengagement strategies procedures used in district independent study programs shall include local programs intended to address chronic absenteeism, as applicable, including but not limited to the following: (Education Code 51747)

1. Verification of current contact information for each enrolled student.
2. Notification to parents/guardians of lack of participation within one school day of the recording of a nonattendance day or lack of participation.
3. A plan for outreach from the school to determine student needs, including connection with health and social services as necessary.
4. A clear standard for requiring a student-parent-educator conference to review a student's written agreement and reconsider the independent study program's impact on the student's achievement and well-being.

The Superintendent or designee shall, for students who participate in an independent study program for 15 school days or more, develop a plan to transition students whose families wish to return to in-person instruction from independent study expeditiously, and, in no case, later than five instructional days. (Education Code 51747)

When any student enrolled in classroom-based instruction is participating in independent study due to necessary medical treatment or inpatient treatment for mental health or substance abuse under the care of appropriately licensed professionals, the student shall be exempt from the live interaction and/or synchronous instruction, tiered reengagement strategies, and transition back to in-person instruction requirements specified above. In such cases, evidence from appropriately licensed professionals, of the student's need to participate in independent study, shall be submitted to the Superintendent or designee. (Education Code 51747)

The Superintendent or designee shall ensure that a written agreement exists for each participating student as prescribed by law. (Education Code 51747, 51749.5)

Upon the request of the parent/guardian of a student, and before signing a written agreement as described below in the section "Master Agreement," the district shall conduct a telephone, videoconference, or in-person student-parent-educator conference or other meeting during which the student, parent/guardian, and, if requested by the parent/guardian an advocate, may ask questions about the educational options, including which curriculum offerings and nonacademic supports will be available to the student in independent study. (Education Code 51747)

Master Agreement

A written agreement shall be developed and implemented for each student participating in independent study for three or more consecutive school days. (Education Code 46300, 51747)

For student participation for 15 school days or more, a signed written agreement shall be obtained before the student begins independent study. For student participation of less than 15 school days, a signed written agreement shall be obtained within ten school days of the first day of the student's enrollment. (Education Code 46300, 51747)

The agreement shall include general student data, including the student's name, address, grade level, birth date, school of enrollment, and program placement.

The independent study agreement for each participating student also shall include, but is not limited to, all of the following: (Education Code 51747; 5 CCR 11700, 11702)

1. The manner, time, frequency, and place for submitting the student's assignments, reporting the student's academic progress, and communicating with a student's parent/guardian regarding the student's academic progress.
2. The objectives and methods of study for the student's work and the methods used to evaluate that work.
3. The specific resources that will be made available to the student, including materials and personnel, and access to Internet connectivity and devices adequate to participate in the educational program and complete assigned work.
4. A statement of the Board's policy detailing the maximum length of time allowed between an assignment and its completion, the level of satisfactory educational progress, and the number of missed assignments which will trigger an evaluation of whether the student should be allowed to continue in independent study.
5. The duration of the independent study agreement, including the beginning and ending dates for the student's participation in independent study under the agreement, with a maximum of one school year.
6. A statement of the number of course credits or, for the elementary grades, other measures of academic accomplishment appropriate to the agreement, to be earned by the student upon completion.
7. A statement detailing the academic and other supports that will be provided to address the needs of students who are not performing at grade level, or need support in other areas, such as English learners, students with disabilities with an individualized education program or a Section 504 plan in order to be consistent with their program or plan, students in foster care or experiencing homelessness, and students requiring mental health supports.
8. A statement that independent study is an optional educational alternative in which no student may be required to participate.
9. In the case of a suspended or expelled student who is referred or assigned to any school, class, or program pursuant to Education Code 48915 or 48917, a statement that instruction may be provided through independent study only if the student is offered the alternative of classroom instruction.
10. Before the commencement of independent study projected to last for 15 school days or more, or within ten school days of the first day of enrollment for independent study for less than 15 school days, the agreement shall be signed and dated by the student, the student's parent/guardian or caregiver if the student is under 18 years of age, the certificated employee responsible for the general supervision of independent study, and for students with disabilities, the certificated employee designated as having responsibility for the special education programming of the student.

Written agreements may be signed using an electronic signature that complies with state and federal standards, as determined by the California Department of Education (CDE). (Education Code 51747)

The parent/guardian's signature on the agreement shall constitute permission for the student to receive instruction through independent study.

Course-Based Independent Study

Should the District offer a course-based independent study program for students in grades K-12, the course-based

independent study program shall be subject to the following requirements: (Education Code 51749.5)

1. A signed learning agreement shall be completed and on file for each participating student, pursuant to Education Code 51749.6.
2. Courses shall be taught under the general supervision of certificated employees who hold the appropriate subject matter credential and are employed by the district or by another district, charter school, or county office of education with which the district has a memorandum of understanding to provide the instruction.
3. Courses shall be annually certified by Board resolution to be of the same rigor and educational quality and to provide intellectual challenge that is substantially equivalent to in-person, classroom-based instruction, and shall be aligned to all relevant local and state content standards. For high schools, this shall include access to all courses offered by the district for graduation and approved by UC or CSU as creditable under the A-G admissions criteria. The certification shall, at a minimum, include the duration, number of equivalent daily instructional minutes for each school day that student is enrolled, number of equivalent total instructional minutes, and number of course credits for each course, consistent with that of equivalent classroom-based courses. The certification shall also include plans to provide opportunities throughout the school year, for all students in transitional kindergarten, kindergarten, and grades 1-3 to receive daily synchronous instruction, for all students in grades 4-8, to receive both daily live interaction and at least weekly synchronous instruction, and for all students in grades 9-12 to receive at least weekly synchronous instruction.
4. Students enrolled in independent study courses shall meet the applicable age requirements established pursuant to Education Code 46300.1, 46300.4, 47612, and 47612.1, and the applicable residency and enrollment requirements established pursuant to Education Code 46300.2, 47612, 48204, and 51747.3.
5. For each student participating in an independent study course, satisfactory educational progress shall be determined based on the student's achievement and engagement in the independent study program as indicated by the student's performance on applicable student-level measures of student achievement and engagement set forth in Education Code 52060, completion of assignments, assessments, or other indicators that evidence that the student is working on assignments, learning of required concepts, as determined by the supervising teacher, and progress toward successful completion of the course of study or individual course, as determined by the supervising teacher.

   If satisfactory educational progress in one or more independent study courses is not being made, the teacher providing instruction shall notify the student and, if the student is under 18 years of age, the student's parent/guardian. The teacher shall conduct an evaluation to determine whether it is in the student's best interest to remain in the course or whether the student should be referred to an alternative program, which may include, but is not limited to, a regular school program. A written record of the evaluation findings shall be treated as a mandatory interim student record maintained for three years from the date of the evaluation. If the student transfers to another California public school, the record shall be forwarded to that school.

   Procedures for tiered reengagement strategies shall be used for all students who are not making satisfactory educational progress in one or more courses or who are in violation of the written learning agreement, as described in the section "Learning Agreement for Course-Based Independent Study" below. These procedures shall include, but are not necessarily limited to, the verification of current contact information for each enrolled student, a plan for outreach from the school to determine student needs, including connection with health and social services as necessary, and a clear standard for requiring a student-parent-educator conference to review a student's written agreement and reconsider the independent study program's impact on the student's achievement and well-being.
6. Examinations shall be administered by a proctor.
7. Statewide testing results shall be reported and assigned to the school at which the student is enrolled and shall be included in the aggregate results of the district. Test results also shall be disaggregated for purposes of comparisons with the test results of students enrolled in classroom-based courses.
8. A student shall not be required to enroll in courses included in the course-based independent study program.
9. The student-teacher ratio in the courses in this program shall meet the requirements of Education Code 51745.6.
10. For each student, the combined equivalent daily instructional minutes for courses in this program and all other courses shall meet applicable minimum instructional day requirements, and the student shall be offered the minimum annual total equivalent instructional minutes pursuant to Education Code 46200-46208.

11. Courses required for high school graduation or for admission to UC or CSU shall not be offered exclusively through independent study.
12. A student participating in this program shall not be assessed a fee that is prohibited by Education Code 49011.
13. A student shall not be prohibited from participating in independent study solely on the basis that the student does not have the materials, equipment, or access to Internet connectivity necessary to participate in the course.
14. A student with disabilities, as defined in Education Code 56026, may participate in course-based independent study if the student's individualized education program specifically provides for that participation.
15. A temporarily disabled student shall not receive individual instruction pursuant to Education Code 48206.3 through course-based independent study.
16. The district shall maintain a plan to transition any student whose family wishes to return to in-person instruction from course-based independent study expeditiously, and, in no case, later than five instructional days.

Learning Agreement for Course-Based Independent Study

Before enrolling a student in a course within a course-based independent study program, the Superintendent or designee shall provide the student and, if the student is under age 18 years, the student's parent/guardian with a written learning agreement that includes all of the following: (Education Code 51749.6)

1. A summary of the district's policies and procedures related to course-based independent study pursuant to Education Code 51749.5.
2. The duration of the enrolled course(s) and the number of course credits for each enrolled course, consistent with the Board certifications made pursuant to Item #3 of the Course-Based Independent Study section above.
3. The duration of the learning agreement, which shall not exceed a school year or span multiple school years.
4. The learning objectives and expectations for each course, including, but not limited to, a description of how satisfactory educational progress is measured and when a student evaluation is required to determine whether the student should remain in the course or be referred to an alternative program, which may include, but is not limited to, a regular school program.
5. The specific resources that will be made available to the student, including materials and personnel, and access to Internet connectivity and devices adequate to participate in the educational program and complete assigned work.
6. A statement detailing the academic and other supports that will be provided to address the needs of students who are not performing at grade level, or need support in other areas, such as English learners, students with disabilities with an individualized education program or a Section 504 plan in order to be consistent with their program or plan, students in foster care or experiencing homelessness, and students requiring mental health supports.
7. A statement that enrollment is an optional educational alternative in which no student may be required to participate. In the case of a suspended or expelled student who is referred or assigned to any school, class, or program pursuant to Education Code 48915 or 48917, a statement that instruction may be provided through course-based independent study only if the student is offered the alternative of classroom instruction.
8. The manner, time, frequency, and place for submitting a student's assignments, for reporting the student's academic progress, and for communicating with a student's parent/guardian regarding a student's academic progress.
9. The objectives and methods of study for the student's work, and the methods used to evaluate that work.
10. A statement of the adopted policies regarding the maximum length of time allowed between the assignment and the completion of a student's assigned work, the level of satisfactory educational progress, and the number of missed assignments allowed before an evaluation of whether the student should be allowed to continue in course-based independent study.
11. A statement of the number of course credits or, for the elementary grades, other measures of academic accomplishment appropriate to the learning agreement, to be earned by the student upon completion.
12. Before the commencement of an independent study course projected to last for 15 school days or more, or

within ten school days of the first day of enrollment for an independent study course projected to last less than 15 school days, the learning agreement shall be signed and dated by the student, and by the student's parent/guardian or caregiver if the student is less than 18 years of age, the certificated employee responsible for the general supervision of the independent study course, and as applicable for students with disabilities, the certificated employee designated as having responsibility for the special education programming of the student. For purposes of this paragraph "caregiver" means a person who has met the requirements of Family Code 6550-6552.

Learning agreements may be signed using an electronic signature that complies with state and federal standards, as determined by CDE. (Education Code 51749.6)

A signed learning agreement from a parent/guardian of a student who is less than 18 years of age shall constitute the parent/guardian's permission for the student to receive instruction through course-based independent study. (Education Code 51749.6)

Upon the request of a student's parent/guardian, and before signing a learning agreement as described above, the district shall conduct a telephone, videoconference, or in-person student-parent-educator conference, or other meeting during which the student, parent/guardian, and, if requested by the parent/guardian, an advocate, may ask questions about the educational options, including which curriculum offerings and nonacademic supports will be available to the student in independent study. (Education Code 51749.6)

Student-Parent-Educator Conferences

A student-parent-educator conference shall be held as appropriate including, but not limited to, as a reengagement strategy and/or, if requested by a parent/guardian, prior to enrollment or disenrollment from independent study. (Education Code 51745.5, 51747, 51749.5)

Records

The Superintendent or designee shall ensure that records are maintained for audit purposes.

These records shall include, but not be limited to: (Education Code 51748; 5 CCR 11703)

1. A copy of the Board policy, administrative regulation, and other procedures related to independent study.
2. A listing of the students, by grade level, program, and school, who have participated in independent study, along with the units of the curriculum attempted and completed by students in grades K-8 and the course credits attempted by and awarded to students in grades 9-12 and adult education.
3. A file of all agreements, with representative samples of each student's work products bearing the supervising teacher's signed or initialed and dated notations indicating that the teacher has personally evaluated the work or personally reviewed the evaluations made by another certificated teacher.
4. As appropriate to the program in which the students are participating, a daily or hourly attendance register that is separate from classroom attendance records, maintained on a current basis as time values of student work products judged by a certificated teacher, and reviewed by the supervising teacher if they are two different persons.
5. Appropriate documentation of compliance with the teacher-student ratios required by Education Code 51745.6 and 51749.5 (Education Code 51745.6 and 51749.5).
6. Appropriate documentation of compliance with the requirements pursuant to Education Code 51747.5 to ensure the coordination, evaluation, and supervision of the independent study of each student by a district employee who possesses a valid certification document pursuant to Education Code 44865 or an emergency credential pursuant to Education Code 44300 (Education Code 51747.5).

The district shall document each student's participation in live interaction and synchronous instruction pursuant to Education Code 51747 on each school day, as applicable, in whole or in part, for which live interaction or synchronous instruction is provided as part of the independent study program. A student who does not participate in scheduled live interaction or synchronous instruction shall be documented as nonparticipatory for that school day. (Education Code 51747.5).

The Superintendent or designee shall also maintain a written or computer-based record such as a grade book or summary document of student engagement, for each class, of all grades, assignments, and assessments for each

student for independent study assignments. (Education Code 51747.5).

Signed written and supplemental agreements, assignment records, work samples, and attendance records may be maintained as an electronic file in accordance with Education Code 51747 and 51749.6, as applicable.

Program Evaluation

The Superintendent or designee may annually report to the Board the number of district students participating in independent study, the average daily attendance generated for apportionment purposes, student performance as measured by standard indicators and in comparison to students in classroom-based instruction, and the number and proportion of independent study students who graduate or successfully complete independent study. Based on the program evaluation, the Board and Superintendent may determine areas for program improvement as needed.