

State Guidance for Distance Education- Summary

For complete definitions, requirements, reporting procedures, curriculum approval requirements, testing guidance, and other state policies, download the full State Guidance for Distance Education.

Definitions for Distance Learning

Distance learning is a formal learning activity in which learners and instructors are separated by geography, time, or both for most 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 learners using methods including, but not limited to, communication via mail, phone, email, online software, and face-to-face instruction.

Distance education models are further clarified in [Defining Distance Education in Texas AEL](#).

Distance Education Models: Texas Style

Texas has reviewed evidence-based learning models to construct a framework for how it defines distance learning activities. Texas understands that adult students need flexibility to connect to services. However, Texas wants AEL providers across the state to maintain the rigor and high-quality instruction adult students deserve and desire. As TWC worked through the many models of instruction, staff landed on two distinct approaches:

- **Synchronous Learning:** Learning where instructors and students gather at the same time and (virtual or physical) place while interacting in “real time.” Synchronous learning results in direct hours. Examples of Synchronous Learning in Distance Education include video conferencing, instant messaging (such as on WhatsApp, Facebook Group or Messenger), texting, and interactive webinars. [Refer to the Stanford School of Education.](#)
- **Asynchronous Learning:** Learning where students access materials at their own pace, time, and place while interacting with each other and their teacher over longer time periods. Examples of

Asynchronous Learning in Distance Education include studying approved distance learning software or printed materials, watching supplemental videos from home, and participating in online discussion boards. Asynchronous learning results in proxy hours when using an approved DL curriculum. [Refer to the Stanford School of Education.](#)

Distance Learning for Adult Education and Literacy Participants

There are several ways that a student can use both synchronous and asynchronous options to ensure their instructional goals are being met. They should be able to participate in a variety of ways in order to earn the instructional time needed to make educational progress. Evidence-based practices across the country have codified the following terms when used to identify an instructional approach under distance education:

- **Blended Learning:** A formal learning activity that involves a tight integration of synchronous instruction delivered online and in class. It combines in-class learning with online instruction as a collective whole. Blended Learning allows instructors to base in-class instruction on online observations and base online assignments on in-class observations (EdTech Center @ World Education, 2022).
- **Flex Learning:** A formal learning activity that gives participants the choice of attending a synchronous class in person or virtually for direct class hours. (Christiansen Institute, 2022)
- **Hybrid Learning:** A formal learning activity that involves synchronous face-to-face or remote class plus distance learning curriculum. The two components are not fully aligned, and students are not required to participate in both. Hybrid Learning allows students to not only participate in synchronous classes but also gives them the option of working on distance learning curriculum outside of class time (EdTech Center @ World Education, 2022).
- **Remote Learning:** A formal learning activity that involves a group of participants engaging with an instructor at the same time. This is often referred to as synchronous learning. Remote Learning is delivered using tools such as video conferencing, live chat, webinars, and so on (EdTech Center @ World Education, 2022).

Distance Learning Participant Descriptions for Federal Reporting

For federal reporting purposes, a “distance learner” is a participant with at least 12 direct hours who has more proxy (distance learning) contact hours than direct contact hours at the end of the PY. These participants are reported annually on relevant NRS reporting tables.

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 “nondistance learner” is a participant who has fewer proxy contact hours than direct contact hours or no proxy hours at all.

Testing Distance Learning Participants

Students enrolled in distance learning classes must be tested according to the same policies and procedures as students who are not enrolled in distance learning classes, as outlined in the Testing Guide. Tests for distance learning students must be administered face to face or through virtual/remote proctored exams following the test publishers’ guidelines, unless an Alternative Placement is being used.

National Reporting System Posttesting

All students engaged in distance learning courses who were pretested with an NRS-approved test will be posttested after the same amount of instructional time as other students, as outlined in the Testing Guide. Both direct contact hours and proxy contact hours are counted to calculate the amount of instructional time required before posttesting.

AEL providers can administer pre- and posttests to measure the MSGs of distance education learners for NRS reporting in two ways: in person, at a secured, proctored program site that meets the requirements of this Testing Guide or through virtual proctoring. Programs that choose to use virtual proctoring can only use NRS-approved tests for which the test publisher has established procedures for virtual administration of the test. The test publisher procedures on virtual proctoring will address such topics as the proper identification of the student, test security, training requirements for test proctors, technology requirements, and procedures for retesting should virtual administration of the test be interrupted.

Requirement for Direct Contact Hours

Students in distance learning must have an established POP in the current PY before they can be counted for federal reporting purposes. This means that in their first year of participation, they must have 12 direct contact hours to establish participant status. In subsequent PYs, if they remain in an active POP, they only need one direct contact hour to establish participant status in the new PY before proxy contact hours will count. However, if their POP has ended, they will again need 12 direct contact hours to establish participant status.

Direct contact hours involve interaction between the student 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 student 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 students spend in distance learning activities. Proxy contact hours differ from direct contact hours in that the identity of the student 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 TWC's data management system separately from direct contact hours. All proxy contact hours must be documented using the method described by the [Approved Distance Learning Curriculum Listings](#) chart.

Proxy hours cannot be counted when a student is in a classroom with the instructor but is using distance learning curriculum. These hours would be counted as direct contact hours.

Distance Learning Curriculum Models

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

- **Clock Time Model**—Assigns proxy contact hours based on the time that a student 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 student spends interacting with instructional material and stops counting idle time after a preset period of inactivity.
- **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 student'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 students to be counted for proxy hour credit.

- **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 TWC's data management system](#), with associated models used for calculating proxy contact hours, is posted on the [TCALL website](#).

Provider curricula for which proxy contact hours are to be calculated must first meet criteria established by TWC. Curriculum providers must complete the [Distance Learning Curriculum Survey](#). Curriculum providers must conduct a pilot for the distance learning curriculum approval committee. Once TWC accepts the pilot and survey, the distance learning curriculum is added to the list of distance learning curricula authorized to enter proxy hours in TWC's data management system.

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 TWC's data management system for distance learners and students with proxy contact hours. For data to be reported on NRS federal reporting tables, 12 or more direct contact hours and a test are required.

When creating a distance learning class in TWC's data management system, it is necessary to identify the curriculum and the model used for calculating proxy contact hours. Once identified as a distance learning class in TWC's data management system, students 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 face-to-face instruction that is supplemental to the distance learning curriculum.

Reporting Instructional Hours

Providers must report all instructional hours in TWC's data management system. Classes that have been identified as distance learning classes in the data management system 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 Distance Learning [Plan](#) can be found on the [TCALL website](#).

Grantees may serve individuals who reside outside of their service area if specifically identified in their Distance Education Plan and agreed upon through coordination with area Grantee(s) in which the student resides. Grantees must be advised that the funding provided in their grant is meant to support the outlined service delivery area or specified counties in the grant award and the instances of serving individuals who reside within other counties or areas should be limited and determined on a case-by-case basis to support the needs of the student and not as a strategy for enrollment. Duplication of services will be closely monitored by TWC.

Required Training for Distance Learning Staff

As part of the professional development requirements outlined in the [Staff Professional Development Requirements](#) section, 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 TWC's data management system.

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 TWC's data management system.

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 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 professional development plan.

Module 4 is recommended for all staff members who collect, enter, or use distance learning reports and remit proxy hours into TWC's data management system.

TWC also recommends taking the Professional Development Portal Training, AEL Fundamentals: Overview of Distance Learning in Texas, and TEAMS Overview.

Complete State Guidance

This document provides a summary of key Texas requirements for distance education in Adult Education and Literacy programs and is intended as a quick reference. Programs are responsible for following the complete requirements established by the Texas Workforce Commission.

For complete definitions, requirements, reporting procedures, curriculum approval requirements, testing guidance, and other state policies, download the full State Guidance for Distance Education.