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**Distance Learning and e-Learning Policy**

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**The Background:**

The 107<sup>th</sup> Session of the Tennessee General Assembly created the “Virtual Public Schools Act.”<sup>1</sup> This act gives local education agencies the authority to establish virtual schools; and permits LEAs to contract for services with nonprofit or for-profit entities to manage and operate virtual schools. Another provision of this act requires State Board of Education to promulgate rules and regulations relative to the operation of virtual schools. The State Board of Education also maintains this authority under T.C.A. §49-16-102.

In 2008 the State Board of Education adopted the “Policy on Distance Learning and e-Learning.” The ever-changing nature of this field requires that the policy be revisited frequently. In April of 2011 the State Board of Education made additional revisions to the policy. The proposed revisions bring to policy into alignment with current statute and proposed rule changes.

**The Master Plan Connection:**

This item supports the Board’s *Master Plan* by ensuring that all students can complete rigorous, relevant curriculum via distance learning and e-learning.

**The Recommendation:**

The State Board of Education staff recommends adoption of this item on final reading.

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**State of Tennessee  
BOARD OF EDUCATION**

**Policy on Distance Learning and e-Learning**

**1. General.**

- 1.1. The following policy establishes requirements for distance learning and e-learning options for all grade levels, including student needs, course content, teacher/facilitator guidelines, virtual classes, funding, and management at the state, county, and school levels.
- 1.2. The purpose of this policy is to lend guidance to local school districts and assure consistent high quality education for the students of Tennessee while utilizing distance learning and e-learning. This policy is intended to meet the needs of, and is limited to, those students enrolled in Tennessee public schools.
- 1.3. This policy is promulgated under authority of the State Board of Education as authorized in T.C.A. §49-1-301.
- 1.4. This policy becomes effective upon final approval by the State Board of Education.
- 1.5. Districts are encouraged to utilize distance learning and e-learning for students for the following, but not limited to: students with health related issues, for original and accelerated course credit, credit recovery, to ameliorate issues of education equity, or for students that need a nontraditional instructional delivery method.
- 1.6. Students may be permitted to access distance learning and e-learning courses to accelerate, expand and enhance the curricular offerings available to them. These may include highly rigorous courses that are otherwise unavailable including, but not limited to courses that lead to college credit. Further, distance learning and e-learning shall be permissible tools to remediate students towards obtaining the skills and knowledge necessary to meet Tennessee graduation requirements.

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**2. Course Approval.**

- 2.1. Distance learning and e-learning courses may be used to complete courses approved in Policy 3.205, Approved High School Courses. Local education agencies using distance learning and e-learning courses in this way must ensure that the courses meet the applicable State Board approved curriculum standards.
- 2.2. LEAs wishing to offer distance learning and e-learning courses that are not on the list of approved high school courses shall submit those courses to the Department of Education for consideration pursuant to State Board Rule 0520-01-03-.05. (2). This submission shall include, but not be limited to, course content, pedagogical strategies, interactivity, assignments, and assessments. All courses submitted for approval shall be evaluated based upon SREB/NACOL protocols.
- 2.3. Providers of distance learning and e-learning courses shall adhere to the state and federal privacy and safety regulations regarding students and teachers.
- 2.4. In accordance with local education agency policy, students who have been expelled from school for long-term periods may, at the student's expense, enroll in distance education and e-learning and receive credit for completed courses.

**3. Management.**

- 3.1. Students may, at the local education agencies' discretion, take courses at the school, from home, or from any location deemed appropriate by local education agency policy.
- 3.2. Local education agencies shall provide for appropriate monitoring of those students taking courses offsite as determined by local education agency policy.
- 3.3. If the course is taken at the school, the student shall be monitored by either a licensed Tennessee teacher or a course facilitator. Course

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- facilitators shall, at minimum, meet the same employment criteria as those who are educational assistants. Course facilitators shall be employees of the school district in which the school is located.
- 3.4. Course facilitators located in Tennessee schools shall be required to complete appropriate training provided by the local education agency.
  - 3.5. Distance learning and e-learning course facilitators and teachers shall receive training or technology-delivered instructions pertaining to the course organization, classroom management, learning management system, technical aspects, monitoring of student testing, and securing other student services as needed. This training shall be provided as part of the agreement between the provider and the local education agency and shall be updated annually or more frequently if appropriate.
  - 3.6. The director of schools shall designate a distance learning and e-learning contact at both the district level and school level to ensure that information is provided to students and parents, any necessary affiliation agreements with the course provider are secured, appropriate personnel have been identified and placed, and that other necessary duties are completed in order to provide student access.
  - 3.7. Distance learning and e-learning courses shall be assigned the same state course numbers and be reflected on student transcripts in the same manner as traditional courses. It is the responsibility of the local education agency to ensure that all distance and e-learning courses utilize course content standards approved by the State Board of Education.

#### **4. Evaluation of Progress.**

- 4.1. The local education agency is responsible for establishing specific procedures for evaluating pupil progress and administering a final grade based upon provider guidelines and district policy. In any case, the final grading scale must be in accordance with the State Board of Education's Uniform Grading Policy.
- 4.2. Students who take courses with associated end-of-course examinations shall take these examinations in order to receive credit in the course.

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These examinations shall count the percentage of the final grade as outlined in State Board of Education Rules and Policies. Local education agencies shall develop policies to ensure that these examinations are taken in a timely and secure manner in accordance with test security standards.

**5. Technology Access.**

- 5.1. Students who are enrolled in distance learning and e-learning courses shall, at minimum, have access to appropriate technologies and resources at the school.
- 5.2. When available and appropriate, student access may be authorized at other equipped locations such as, but not limited to: public libraries, community learning centers and homes.
- 5.3. The distance learning and e-learning coordinator will be responsible for assisting students in finding solutions for appropriate technology access.

**6. Funding.**

- 6.1. A student who participates in distance learning and e-learning courses shall, for funding and attendance purposes, be counted as present for the portion of the school day that would otherwise be occupied if the student were taking the course in a traditional manner. This applies whether the student is taking the course at a school or some other venue.
- 6.2. Funding for distance learning and e-learning courses and associated materials may be provided through the local education agencies' instructional budgets. Further, local education agencies are encouraged to use grant awards or other appropriate funding sources to meet the needs of students in the district.
- 6.3. The local education agency may not be responsible for costs if the selected course is currently being offered at the school and there is no justifiable reason to duplicate the school course.

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**7. Guidelines and Procedures.**

- 7.1. The State Department of Education will develop and the State Board of Education will approve guidelines and procedures that make timely accommodations to the rapidly changing options for distance learning and e-learning. The State Department of Education will report annually to the State Board of Education on the status of distance learning and e-learning in the State of Tennessee.
  
- 7.2. Local education agencies are encouraged to develop policies, guidelines, and procedures related to distance learning and e-learning management, evaluation of progress, technology access, and funding.