

Instruction

Independent Study

Definitions

Live interaction means interaction between the student and classified or certificated staff, and may include peers, provided for the purpose of maintaining school connectedness, including, but not limited to, wellness checks, progress monitoring, provision of services, and instruction. This interaction may take place in person, or in the form of Internet or telephonic communication. (Education Code 51745.5)

Student-parent-educator conference means a meeting involving, at a minimum, all parties who signed the student's written independent study agreement pursuant to Education Code 51747 or the written learning agreement pursuant to Education Code 51749.6. (Education Code 51745.5)

Synchronous instruction means classroom-style instruction or designated small group or one-on-one instruction delivered in person, or in the form of Internet or telephonic communications, and involving live two-way communication between the teacher and student. Synchronous instruction shall be provided by the teacher of record for that student pursuant to Education Code 51747.5. (Education Code 51745.5)

The district shall not provide independent study students and their parents/ guardians with funds or items of value that are not provided for other students and their parents/guardians. (Education Code 46300.6, 51747.3)

Educational Opportunities

For the 2021-22 school year, the district shall offer both long-term independent study (Virtual Academy) and short-term independent study (less than 15 days) to meet the educational needs of students as specified in Education Code 51745 unless the district has obtained a waiver. (Education Code 51745)

Educational opportunities offered through independent study may include, but are not limited to:

1. Special assignments extending the content of regular courses of instruction
2. Individualized study in a particular area of interest or in a subject not currently available in the regular school curriculum
3. Individualized alternative education designed to teach the knowledge and skills of the core curriculum, but not provided as an alternative curriculum
4. Continuing and special study during travel
5. Volunteer community service activities and leadership opportunities that support and strengthen student achievement
6. Individualized study for a student whose health, as determined by the student's parent/guardian, would be put at risk by in-person instruction

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In addition, when requested by a parent/guardian due to an emergency or illness, independent study may be used on a short-term basis to ensure that the student is able to maintain academic progress in the student's regular classes.

Eligibility for Independent Study

Students are eligible for independent study (including long-term independent study through the Virtual Academy) as authorized in law, and as specified in board policy and administrative regulation.

For the 2022-23 school year and thereafter, the Superintendent or designee may approve the participation of a student who demonstrates the motivation, commitment, organizational skills, and academic skills necessary to work independently provided that experienced certificated staff are available to effectively supervise students in independent study. The Superintendent or designee may also approve the participation of a student whose health would be put at risk by in-person instruction. A student whose academic performance is not at grade level may participate in independent study only if the program is able to provide appropriate support, such as supplemental instruction, tutoring, counseling, ongoing diagnostic assessments, and/or differentiated materials, to enable the student to be successful. For an elementary student, the Superintendent or designee may consider the parent/guardian's level of commitment to assist the student.

No student shall be required to participate in independent study. (Education Code 51747)

Students enrolling in independent study must be residents of the local county or an adjacent county. (Education Code 51747.3) The Virtual Academy for long-term independent study shall not be available to students whose district residency status is based on their parent/guardian's employment within district boundaries pursuant to Education Code 48204. (Education Code 46300.2, 51747.3)

No individual with disabilities, as defined in Education Code 56026, may participate in independent study unless his/her Individualized Education Program specifically provides for such participation. (Education Code 51745)

(cf. 6159 - Individualized Education Program)

No temporarily disabled student may receive individual instruction pursuant to Education Code 48206.3 by means of independent study. (Education Code 51745)

(cf. 6183 - Home and Hospital Instruction)

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Criteria for Participation

Parents who are interested in short-term independent study for their students should contact their school principal. For long-term independent study (the Virtual Academy), parents should contact the district office. Approval for participation shall be based on the following criteria:

1. Evidence that the student will work independently to complete the program.
2. Availability of experienced certificated staff with adequate time to supervise the student effectively.

Written Agreements and Assignments

The written independent study agreement for each participating student should include, but not be limited to, all of the following: (Education Code 51747)

1. The manner, frequency, time and place for submitting the student's assignments and for reporting his/her 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, including materials and personnel, that will be made available to the student.
4. The district's independent study policy describing the maximum length of time allowed between an assignment and its completion 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.
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 that independent study is an optional educational alternative in which no student may be required to participate. In the case of a student who is referred or assigned to any school, class or program pursuant to Education Code 48915 or 48917, the agreement shall also include the statement that instruction may be provided through independent study only if the student is offered the alternative of classroom instruction.

(cf. 5144.1 - Suspension and Expulsion/Due Process)

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The curriculum and methods of study specified in the written agreement shall be consistent with the Governing Board's policies, administrative regulations and procedures for curriculum and instruction. (5 CCR 11702)

(cf. 6143 - Courses of Study)

The agreement also may include a schedule for achieving objectives and completing the agreement and a schedule of conferences between the student and supervising teacher.

Before beginning the independent study, each written agreement shall be signed and dated by the student, the parent/guardian or caregiver of the student under 18 years of age, the certificated employee designated as responsible for the general supervision of independent study, and all persons who have direct responsibility for providing assistance to the student. (Education Code 51747)

The agreement shall state that the parent/guardian's signature confers his/her permission for the student's independent study as specified in the agreement.

Student Rights and Responsibilities

Students participating in long-term independent study (the Virtual Academy) shall have the right to enter or return to the regular classroom mode of instruction. Upon request to either enter or exit the program, the district will have five days to transfer the student into or out of the program, and any student entering the program must remain for a minimum of 3 consecutive days.

Independent study students who are late, miss scheduled conferences or do not submit assigned work on time shall not be reported as tardy or truant. However, the independent study administrator shall promptly and directly address any failure by the student to meet the terms of his/her written agreement. The following supportive strategies may be used:

1. A letter to the student and/or parent/guardian, as appropriate.
2. A special meeting between the student and the teacher and/or counselor.
3. A meeting between the student and the administrator, including the parent/guardian if appropriate.
4. An increase in the amount of time the student works under direct supervision.

When the student has missed the number of assignments specified in Board policy as precipitating an evaluation (three assignments), the Superintendent or designee may conduct an evaluation which may result in termination of the independent study agreement, with the student's return to a regular classroom or alternative instructional program.

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(cf. 1312 - Complaints Concerning the Schools)
(cf. 1312.1 - Complaints Concerning District Employees)

Administration of Independent Study

Each student's independent study shall be coordinated, evaluated and carried out under the general supervision of a certificated employee. (Education Code 51747.5)

Responsibilities of Independent Study Administrator

The responsibilities of the Independent Study Administrator include, but are not limited to:

1. Recommending certificated staff to be assigned as independent study teachers at the required teacher-student ratios pursuant to Education Code 51745.6 and supervising staff assigned to independent study functions who are not regularly supervised by another administrator
2. Approving or denying the participation of students requesting independent study
3. Facilitating the completion of written independent study agreements
4. Ensuring a smooth transition for students into and out of the independent study mode of instruction
5. Approving all credits earned through independent study
6. Completing or coordinating the preparation of all records and reports required by law, Board policy, or administrative regulation

Assignment and Responsibilities of Independent Study Teachers

Each student's Independent Study shall be coordinated, evaluated, and carried out under the general supervision of a district employee who possesses a valid certification document pursuant to Education Code 44865 or emergency credential pursuant to Education Code 44300, registered as required by law, and who consents to the assignment. (Education Code 44865, 51747.5; 5 CCR 11700)

Supervising Teachers

The Superintendent or designee shall approve the assignment of any teachers who directly supervise long-term independent study (the Virtual Academy) on a regular basis. The principal may recommend teachers or students for short-term independent study. The teacher may be the student's regular classroom teacher for periods less than 15 days.

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Independent study teachers shall:

1. Complete designated portions of the written agreement and add additional information to the written agreement when appropriate.
2. Supervise and approve coursework, including regularly meeting with the student to discuss the student's progress.
3. Design all lesson plans and assignments and provide direct instruction. Maintain records of student assignments showing the date the assignment is given and the date the assignment is due.
4. Assess all student work and assigning grades or other approved measures of achievement.
5. Personally judge the time value of assigned work or work products completed and submitted by the student.
6. Select and save with each agreement representative samples of the student's completed and evaluated assignments on a weekly basis.
7. Sign and complete the agreement when the student has reached his/her objectives or the agreement is terminated.
8. Maintain any required records and files on a current basis including attendance
9. Determine and assign grades or other approved measures of achievement.
10. Document each student's participation in live interaction and/or synchronous instruction pursuant to Education Code 51747 on each school day for which independent study is provided.

The ratio of student average daily attendance for independent study students age 18 years or younger to full-time equivalent certificated employees responsible for independent study shall not exceed the equivalent ratio for all other education programs in the district, unless a new higher or lower ratio for all other educational programs offered is negotiated in a collective bargaining agreement or the district enters into a memorandum of understanding that indicates an existing collective bargaining agreement contains an alternative ratio. (Education Code 51745.6)

The Superintendent or designee shall ensure that independent study teachers have access to professional development and support comparable to classroom-based teachers.

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Records

District records shall identify all students participating in independent study and shall specify the grade level, program placement and school in which each of these students is enrolled. (Education Code 51748)

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