



Independent Study Policy

California Online Public Schools

California Online Public Schools non-profit Board of Directors operates the following charter schools to which this policy applies:

California Online Public Schools Central Coast
California Online Public Schools Central Valley
California Online Public Schools Monterey Bay
California Online Public Schools North Bay
California Online Public Schools Northern California
California Online Public Schools Southern California

The Independent Study Program

The Board of Directors (“Board”) of California Online Public Schools has adopted this policy for the Independent Study Program for all charter schools it governs and operates. The Board oversees the educational program for California Online Public Schools, made up of multiple charter schools using a similar educational program and Educational Management System (hereinafter, “School”). The School’s “Independent Study Program” is an optional alternative instructional strategy by which students in grades TK- 12 may reach curriculum objectives and fulfill promotion requirements.

Students who voluntarily choose the Independent Study Program have the alternative option of returning to a classroom-based instructional program in a school of their district of residence. For students who make a request to the School (including through a parent/guardian/caregiver request) to return to in-person instruction, the School will provide information which will assist the students to enroll in the in-person program offered by their district of residence and will allow the student to withdraw expeditiously within five (5) schooldays. (Education Code § 51747(f).)

Independent study shall offer a means of individualizing the educational plan for students whose needs may be met best through study outside of the regular classroom setting. Independent study is a continuously voluntary, educational alternative in which no student may be required to participate. (Education Code § 51747(g)(8).)

School will provide appropriate services, supports, technology and resources to enable students to complete their independent study program successfully. This will enable students enrolled in independent study to complete their School’s adopted course of study within the customary time frame.

The School will provide content to students aligned to grade level standards that is substantially equivalent to in-person instruction. For high school students, this shall include access to all courses offered by the School for graduation and approved by the University of California or the California State University as creditable under the A-G admissions criteria. (Education Code § 51747(c).)

The School Administration shall ensure that a written Independent Study Master Agreement (“Master Agreement”), as prescribed by law, exists for each participating student. This agreement cannot be valid for longer than one (1) school year. (Education Code § 51747(g)(5).)

The Independent Study Program entails a commitment by the parent/guardian/caregiver, and the student. As the student gets older, he/she/they assumes a greater portion of the responsibility involved. The “Parent/Guardian/Caregiver Acknowledgement”, provided as part of the enrollment process, further lays out the School’s expectations for parents/guardians/caregivers and students.

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

The School shall not provide independent study students and parents/guardians/caregivers with funds or items of value that a school district could not legally provide to a similarly situated student of the district or to his/her/their parent/guardian/caregiver. (Education Code § 51747.3(a).)

The Superintendent or designee(s) shall ensure that the Independent Study Program is carried out in accordance with the law. (Education Code § 51744 et seq.; 5 C.C.R. § 11700 et seq.)

Opportunities for Live Interaction and Synchronous Instruction: The School shall plan to provide opportunities for live interaction and synchronous instruction as follows:

- For pupils in grades TK-3, the School shall plan to provide opportunities for daily synchronous instruction.
- For pupils in grades 4-8, the School shall plan to provide opportunities for both daily live interaction and at least weekly synchronous instruction.
- For pupils in grades 9-12, the School shall plan to provide opportunities for at least weekly synchronous instruction. (Education Code § 51747(e).)

For the purposes of this policy, “live interaction” means interaction between the pupil and certificated or non-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 live interaction may take place in-person, or in the form of internet or telephonic communication, such as a virtual meeting room or live group chat.

For the purposes of this policy, “synchronous instruction” means designated 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 a teacher or teachers of record pursuant to Education Code § 51747.5 and the pupil, such as a virtual meeting room or live chat.

School will document each pupil’s participation in live interaction and synchronous instruction, pursuant to Section 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 pupil who does not participate in scheduled live interaction or synchronous instruction on a school day shall be documented as non-participatory for that school day for purposes of pupil participation reporting and tiered re-engagement pursuant to EC § 51747. (Education Code § 51747.5(c).) For purposes of this policy, “non-participatory” solely refers to whether a student attended live interaction and synchronous instruction offerings. A student who is non-participatory on a school day can still generate attendance on that school day for purposes of apportionment.

Evaluation of Effectiveness of Independent Study for Students

The Board recognizes that independent study may be used as an option to encourage students to remain in school. Teachers should carefully set the duration of independent study assignments, within the limits specified by the Board in order to help identify students falling behind in their work or in danger of failing or dropping out of school.



To foster each student's success in independent study, the Board establishes the following parameters and the maximum lengths of time which may elapse between the time an assignment is made and date by which the student must complete the assigned work. These shall be as follows:

For Grades TK-12, no more than four (4) school weeks may elapse between when a teacher makes an assignment and the date by which a student must complete the assigned work ("Assignment Time"). Where special or extenuating circumstances exist, and this set time limit cannot be met, the grade level Administrator or designee may approve a period not to exceed an additional four (4) weeks. (Education Code § 51747(a).)

Because the School is a virtual school using the independent study model, it is crucial that teachers know that a student is completing adequate work under their Master Agreement to make satisfactory educational progress. There are several methods by which teachers can evaluate if a student is benefitting from delivery of their education through the independent study model. In addition to completing assigned lessons and assessments, and submitting original student work to the teachers, direct contact between the teacher and the student, using the means set out in the Master Agreement, is essential in a virtual program.

Therefore, all of these criteria are considered to be the equivalent of "assignments" (as per Education Code § 51747(b)) for the School's program:

- Substantial and substantive direct contact between the student and teacher (as defined in the Master Agreement), OR
- Active participation in the program as evidenced by satisfactory completion of assigned lessons and assessments; OR
- Submission of the required original student work samples to the certificated employee(s) assigned to the student for evaluation.

The following constitutes the definition of a "missed assignment" (per Education Code § 51747(b)) for the Independent Study Program:

- Failure to conduct a direct contact (as defined in the Master Agreement) between the student and teacher (the supervisory teacher and/or other assigned teachers)
- Completion of less than 70% of the assigned work within a 4 week learning period
- Failure to submit required and assigned work samples, assessments and/or portfolio items to the school

Per Education Code § 51747(b), the Board has determined that the following number of missed assignments, as defined above, will trigger an evaluation of whether it is in the best interests of the student to remain in the Independent Study Program:

- Missing two (2) consecutive contact appointments between the student and teacher
- Completion of less than 70% of the assigned work within a 4 week learning period; or
- Failure to submit the required and assigned work samples, assessments for one (1) school month (learning period)



Satisfactory Educational Progress: In addition, a determination that a student has failed to make satisfactory progress will also trigger an evaluation of whether it is in the best interests of the student to remain in the Independent Study Program. A student is deemed to be making satisfactory educational progress if the student is on track to enter the next grade level (or, for high school students, to earn sufficient credits towards graduation) at the completion of the current school year and/or progressing toward their goals pursuant to their individualized education program (“IEP”). State law dictates what indicators are used to determine satisfactory educational progress. Therefore, satisfactory educational progress shall be based on all of the following indicators, as applicable:

- The student’s achievement and engagement in the Independent Study Program, as indicated by the student’s performance on student-level measures of student achievement and student engagement set forth in Education Code § 52060(d)(4)-(5).
- The completion of assignments, assessments, or other indicators that show the student is working on assignments.
- Learning required concepts, as determined by the supervising teacher.
- Progressing toward successful completion of the course of study or individual course, as determined by the supervising teacher. (Education Code § 51747(b)(2).)

Tiered Reengagement: For all pupils who (1) are in violation of their Master Agreement, or (2) do not generate attendance for more than ten percent (10%) of the required school days in a given attendance month (as defined in the attendance calendar), or (3) do not participate in the school’s offerings of synchronous instruction for more than fifty percent (50%) of the scheduled times in a school month, as applicable by grade span, the School shall have procedures, including the following reengagement strategies:

- Verifying pupil’s current contact information.
- Notifying parents or guardians of lack of participation within one school day of the documentation of a non attendance day or lack of participation.
- A plan for outreach from the school to determine pupil needs, including a connection with health and social services, as necessary.
- A clear standard requiring a pupil-parent-educator conference, as defined below, to review the pupil’s Master Agreement, reconsider the Independent Study Program’s impact on the pupil’s achievement and well-being, consistent with the School’s policies regarding the maximum amount of time allowed between the assignment and completion of pupil’s assigned work (four (4) school weeks), satisfactory educational progress (see above), and the number of missed assignments (see above) allowed before an evaluation of whether the student should be allowed to continue in independent study.
- Implement any programs of the School intended to address chronic absenteeism, as applicable. (Education Code § 51747(d).)

In addition to the tiered engagement strategies described above, the School Administration may provide one of the following supports to students who are not meeting Master Agreement requirements or otherwise may need engagement support:

1. A letter to the student and/or parent/guardian/caregiver, as appropriate.
2. A special meeting between the student, parent/guardian/caregiver and the teacher or designated Administrator.
3. A meeting between the student and the grade level Administrator, including the parent/guardian/caregiver if appropriate.
4. An increase in the amount of time the student works under direct supervision.
5. Placing the student on academic probation.



“Pupil-parent-educator conference” means a meeting involving, at a minimum, all parties who signed the pupil’s written Master Agreement pursuant to Education Code § 51747(g).

The evaluation triggered by the missed assignments or failure to make satisfactory educational progress as described above will be delivered to the parent/guardian/caregivers, and to the student if the student is over eighteen (18) years of age. Written evaluation findings shall also be kept in the student's school record. A written record of the findings of any evaluation made pursuant to this subdivision shall be treated as a mandatory interim pupil record. The record shall be maintained for a period of three years from the date of the evaluation and, if the pupil transfers to another California public school, the record shall be forwarded to that school upon written request. (Education Code § 51747(b).)

If the student fails to address the issues which led to the evaluation within one week of the delivery of the written evaluation, and with prior written notice to the student’s parent/guardian/caregiver in accordance with the law, the School may withdraw the student as a result of the Student’s noncompliance with the Master Agreement.

Eligibility

An individual with exceptional needs, as defined in Education Code § 56026, may participate in independent study if their IEP specifically provides for such participation. (Education Code § 51745(c).) Whether independent study is an appropriate placement to provide a Free and Appropriate Education (FAPE) for a student with an IEP is an individualized determination made by the IEP team. (Education Code § 51745(c).)

No student shall be required to participate in independent study. (Education Code § 51747(g)(8).)

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

No student that is expelled by their previous school pursuant to Education Code § 48915 or a suspended expulsion student pursuant to Education Code § 48917, may be provided with instruction through independent study unless they are offered the alternative of classroom instruction and they choose independent study. (Education Code § 51747(g)(8).)

Students enrolling in the School must be residents of an eligible county (the county where a School is authorized and their geographically contiguous counties). Enrollment eligibility shall not be based on the address of parent/guardian/caregiver employment. The School will not claim apportionment funding for any student who lives outside of an eligible county unless otherwise permitted by law. (Education Code § 51747.3(c).)

Exceptions for Pupils Under Professional Care: Pupils enrolled in a comprehensive school for classroom-based instruction who, under the care of appropriately licensed professionals, participate in independent study due to necessary medical treatments or inpatient treatment for mental health care or substance abuse, are not subject to the tiered reengagement, live interaction, synchronous instruction, nor return to in-person instruction provisions described above. The School shall obtain evidence from appropriately licensed professionals of the need for pupils to participate in independent study pursuant to this subdivision.

Written Agreements and Assignments

A written Master Agreement shall be executed for each participating student. The curriculum and methods of study specified in the Master Agreement shall be consistent with the Board’s policies and procedures for curriculum and instruction. (5 C.C.R. § 11702.)



The Master Agreement shall include, but not be limited to, all of the following:

1. The manner, frequency, time and place for submitting the student's assignments and for reporting the student's academic progress, and for communicating with the student's parent/guardian/caregiver regarding 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, including materials and staff, which will be made available to the student. These resources shall include confirming or providing access for all pupils to the connectivity and devices adequate to participate in the academic program and complete assigned work.
4. A statement of the policies adopted herein regarding the maximum length of time allowed between the assignment, the level of satisfactory educational progress, and the number of missed assignments allowed prior to an evaluation of whether or not the student should be allowed to continue in independent study.
5. The duration of the Master Agreement, including the beginning and ending dates for the student's participation in independent study under the Master Agreement. No Master Agreement shall be valid for any period longer than one (1) school year.
6. A statement of the number of course credits for grades 9 to 12, or, for the grades TK-8, other measures of academic accomplishment appropriate to the Master 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 pupils who are not performing at grade level, or need support in other areas such as English learners, individuals with exceptional needs as needed to be consistent with the student's individualized education program or plan pursuant to Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (29 U.S.C. Sec. 794), pupils in foster care, pupils experiencing homelessness, and pupils requiring mental health supports.
8. The inclusion of a statement in each Master Agreement 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 EC § 48915 or 48917, the agreement also will include the statement that instruction may be provided to the student through independent study only if the student is offered the alternative of classroom instruction. (Education Code § 51747(g).)

School will comply with the signature requirements for independent study written agreements set forth in Education Code § 51747(g)(9), including:

- Each Master Agreement will be signed, prior to the commencement of independent study, by the student, the student's parent, legal guardian, or caregiver, if the student is less than 18 years of age, the certificated employee who has been designated as having responsibility for the general supervision of independent study, and the certificated employee designated as having responsibility for the special education programming of the pupil, as applicable. For purposes of this paragraph, "caregiver" means a person who has met the requirements of Part 1.5 (commencing with Section 6550) of the Family Code.

The Master Agreement also may include a schedule for achieving objectives and completing the agreement and a schedule of conferences between the student and his/her/their supervising teacher.

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

The Master Agreement may be maintained electronically along with and may include subsidiary agreements, such as course contracts and assignment and work records, work samples and attendance records. Master Agreements may be signed using electronic signatures that comply with applicable state and federal standards and are intended by the signatory to have the same effect as a handwritten signature.



Before signing a Master Agreement pursuant to this policy, a parent/guardian/caregiver may request that the School conduct a telephone, videoconference, or in-person pupil-parent-educator conference or other school meeting during which the pupil, parent/guardian/caregiver, and, if requested by the pupil or parent/guardian/caregiver, an education advocate, may ask questions about the educational options, including which curriculum offerings and nonacademic supports will be available to the pupil in independent study, before making the decision about enrollment or disenrollment. (Education Code § 51747(h)(2).)

Supervising Teachers

The Superintendent or designee(s) shall oversee the teachers who directly supervise the independent study on a regular basis and ensure that the supervising teachers:

1. Complete designated portions of the Master Agreement and add additional information to the agreement when appropriate.
2. Supervise and approve coursework.
3. Ensure that any required opportunities for synchronous instruction, based on the student's grade level, are provided and documented.
4. Design/identify curriculum objectives.
5. Initiate and complete the independent study contacts as specified in the Master Agreement for students.
6. Assess all work that students are required to submit to a teacher.
7. Personally judge the time value of assigned work or work products completed and submitted by the student, or personally review the determination of time value made by another certificated teacher.
8. Select and save with each Master Agreement representative samples of the student's completed and evaluated assignments.
9. Maintain any required records and files on a current basis.
10. When appropriate, determine and assign grades or other approved measures of achievement.

Records

School records maintained by each school shall identify all students participating in its Independent Study Program and shall specify the grade level in which each of these students is enrolled. (5 CCR § 11703.)

School will maintain written or computer-based evidence of student engagement that includes, but is not limited to, a grade book or summary document that, for each class, lists all assignments, assessments, and associated grades. (Education Code § 51747.5(d).)

Records shall be maintained for audit purposes and shall include the following (5 C.C.R. § 11703):

1. A copy of the Board policy, administrative regulations, and procedures related to independent study.
2. A separate listing of the students, by grade level, program and school who have participated in independent study identifying units of the curriculum undertaken (also known as the "course of study") and units of the curriculum completed by students in grades TK-8, and identifying course credits attempted by and awarded to students in grades 9-12, as specified in their Master Agreements.
3. A record of all Master Agreements, with representative samples of each student's work products and a signed acknowledgement by the supervising teacher indicating that he/she has personally evaluated the work or that he/she has personally reviewed the evaluations made by another certificated teacher. These records may be created, signed and stored electronically.
4. A daily or hourly attendance register, as appropriate to the program in which the students are enrolled, separate from any in person classroom attendance records, and maintained on a current basis as time values of student work products are personally judged by a teacher, and reviewed by the certificated supervising teacher if they are two different persons.



Parent's Right to Appeal

Parents/guardians/caregivers may appeal decisions in accordance with procedures in the School & Family Policy Catalog. In accordance with Education Code § 47605(c)(5)(J)(iii) parents will be provided with a written notice of the intent to withdraw a student for noncompliance no less than five school days prior to the effective date of the withdrawal.

Effective as of the start of the 2024-25 School Year
Approved by CalOPS Board of Directors 

