

OFFICE OF CHIEF SCHOOL PERFORMANCE OFFICER
Summary of State Board of Education Agenda Items
February 18, 2016

OFFICE OF ACCREDITATION

02. Action: Approval to revise State Board Policy Part 3, Chapter 56, Rule 56.1 – Distance Learning/Online Courses [Goals 1, 2, and 4 – MBE Strategic Plan]
(Has cleared the Administrative Procedures Act process with no public comment)

On January 5, 2016, the Commission on School Accreditation met in a special-called meeting and approved the proposed revisions to the Distance Learning/Online Course Policy. The State Board of Education approved to begin the Administrative Procedures Act process on January 21, 2016.

The proposed revisions will provide guidance to the Local Educational Agencies (LEAs) regarding the use of distance learning and online courses through the Mississippi Virtual Public School (MVPS), the Mississippi Interactive Video Network (MIVN), independent study programs, and other distance learning/online course providers not already approved by the Mississippi Department of Education (MDE).

Based on the questions received from superintendents and principals, MDE program office staff is recommending additional language be added to the policy for clarity.

This item references Goals 1, 2, and 4 of the *Mississippi Board of Education 2016-2020 Strategic Plan*.

Recommendation: Approval

Back-up material attached

Part 3 Chapter 56: Distance Learning/Online Courses

Rule 56.1 Distance Learning/Online Courses. The purpose of the distance learning/online course policy is to provide guidance to Local Education Agencies (LEAs) regarding the use of distance learning and online courses through the Mississippi Virtual Public School (MVPS), the Mississippi Interactive Video Network (MIVN), independent study programs, and other distance learning/online course providers not already approved by the Mississippi Department of Education (MDE).

For the purposes of this policy, **distance learning** is defined as a technological delivery model in which regularly scheduled real-time instruction occurs during the school day where students and instructors are not in the same place and in which a Mississippi-certified teacher is responsible for providing instruction. **Online learning** is defined as a delivery model that is an interactive computer-based and internet-connected learning environment in which students are separated from their teachers by time or location or both and in which a Mississippi-certified teacher is responsible for providing instruction. **Blended learning** is defined as a hybrid instructional delivery model where pupils are provided face-to-face instruction in part at a supervised school facility away from home and in part in a computer-based, internet-connected learning environment with some degree of pupil control over time, location, and pace of instruction and in which a Mississippi-certified teacher is responsible for providing instruction.

1. The **Mississippi Virtual Public School (MVPS)** is an online course system that has been approved by the MDE. The provider is selected through a Request for Proposals process. All courses have been reviewed for alignment to the respective framework. All MVPS courses are assigned a course code that is listed in the *Approved Courses for the Secondary Schools of Mississippi*. There is no limit to the number of online courses that can be taken for Carnegie Unit credit through the MVPS. Enrollment must have prior approval by the principal. MVPS courses can be used for credit recovery. The school district does not provide the certified teacher for the MVPS courses. The school district is required to provide a site coordinator. The MVPS course(s) are free to students on a first-come-first-served basis contingent upon availability of funds appropriated by the legislature, with seniors given priority. Once all MVPS seats are used, districts, schools, or parents may pay the cost for additional students to take MVPS courses.

The **Mississippi Interactive Video Network (MIVN)** is a distance learning system that has been approved by the MDE. This system links certified teachers in one school with classes of students in other schools or districts as a means of delivering real-time instruction. These courses are listed in the *Approved Courses for the Secondary Schools of Mississippi*.

The MDE has approved a limited number of online correspondence courses for **independent study programs** taught by institutions of higher learning in Mississippi. These courses are listed in the *Approved Courses for the Secondary Schools of Mississippi*. LEAs are responsible for determining course funding structure.

2. For all **distance and online courses other than the delivery methods listed in Section 1 above**, LEAs must submit an application to the MDE for approval to ensure that the vendor/provider's content, curriculum, and assessments are aligned to Mississippi's course standards. LEAs are responsible for determining course funding structure. In order to count as a credit toward graduation, course codes must be listed in the *Approved Courses for the Secondary Schools of Mississippi*. There is no limit to the number of courses a student may take. Enrollment in such courses must have prior approval by the principal.

For **blended learning courses** in which an LEA provides a face-to-face Mississippi-certified teacher, no prior approval from the MDE is required. For online programs or computer-assisted instruction in which an LEA is using for the sole purpose of credit recovery, no prior approval from the MDE is required. For online dual enrollment courses through a Mississippi Community College or Institution of Higher Learning, no prior approval from the MDE is required.

3. Beginning with the 2016-2017 school year, any LEA that provides a distance learning/online program other than the delivery methods listed in Section 1 above shall develop and implement a distance learning/online course policy and handbook guidance that has been adopted by the local school board and that includes the rules, regulations, and processes for online courses. The rules, regulations, and processes shall be available to faculty, students, and parents/guardians.

- a. At a minimum, LEAs must ensure the following through local board policy:
- i. Teachers are licensed by the Mississippi Department of Education to teach the respective course;
 - ii. Background checks are conducted for the teachers;
 - iii. The content, curriculum, and assessments for each course are aligned to the competencies, objectives, and standards of the respective Mississippi course;
 - iv. Appropriate course codes are used;
 - v. A facilitator is assigned to assist students;
 - vi. Students have access to the technology needed for courses;
 - vii. Students have all instructional materials needed for courses;
 - viii. The district grading policy is followed;
 - ix. Students enrolled in the courses take the required state assessments where applicable; and
 - x. Documentation is maintained on file at the central office.
- b. At a minimum, the LEA student handbook shall include the following:
- i. The process for notifying parents about the program;
 - ii. Minimum criteria to determine eligibility for participation;
 - iii. The number of distance learning/online courses that students can take at one time;
 - iv. If the distance learning/online course program can be used for credit recovery and/or remediation;

- v. The courses by grade level and content area for the distance learning/online program; and
- vi. The process for monitoring student progress and notifying parents of student progress during the course.

Source: *Miss. Code Ann.* § 37-1-3, 37-161-3 (Adopted 1/2016)

Part 3 Chapter 56: Mississippi Virtual Public Schools Distance Learning/Online Courses

Rule 56.1 Mississippi Virtual Public Schools Distance Learning/Online Courses.

Definition: The Mississippi Virtual Public School Program is a free web-based educational program offered by the Mississippi Department of Education to provide Mississippi students with access to a wider range of course work. Technology will be used to deliver instruction to students via the Internet in a virtual or remote setting.

Local School District: The public school district is responsible for the academic progress of its students, including but not limited to, enrollment, awarding of credit and monitoring progress.

The State Board of Education shall have approval authority for all coursework and policy of the Mississippi Virtual Public School and any other state virtual school.

Scope: Meet the educational needs of children in the State of Mississippi;

Close the achievement gap between high-performing including the achievement gap among at-risk students;

Provide a broader range of educational options to parents by utilizing existing resources, along with technology with a goal of improving student achievement and reducing the drop-out rate in Mississippi; and

Assist local school districts who currently lack the capacity to provide choices to students especially students whose schools are low performing.

Guiding Principles: Administered by Mississippi Department of Education (MDE)

- Credits for course work will be granted by local educational agency (LEA)
- All decisions will be guided by focusing on what is best for the students
- The MVS academic calendar will be coordinated with the districts' calendar
- Most online courses will be taught by Mississippi teachers licensed in the subject area and proficient in web-based course delivery
- Development or selection of courses will involve teacher input and will be aligned to National and Mississippi Frameworks standards
- The quality and assessment for online courses must equal or exceed that for traditional courses
- A needs assessment process will determine the sequence of course development for MVS

Source: *Miss. Code Ann.* § 37-1-3 (Adopted 1/2016)

MISSISSIPPI CODE of 1972

*** Current through the 2015 Regular Session ***

TITLE 37. EDUCATION
CHAPTER 161. MISSISSIPPI EDUCATION REFORM ACT OF 2006

Miss. Code Ann. § 37-161-3 (2015)

§ 37-161-3. Legislative findings and declarations; Mississippi Virtual Public School Program created; definitions; necessary instructional materials and access to necessary technology provided to students enrolled in virtual school; qualifications of teachers; enrollment to be free of charge to students

(1) The Legislature finds and declares the following:

(a) Meeting the educational needs of children in our state's schools is of the greatest importance to the future welfare of the State of Mississippi;

(b) Closing the achievement gap between high-performing students, including the achievement gap among at-risk students, is a significant and present challenge;

(c) Providing a broader range of educational options to parents and utilizing existing resources, along with technology, may help students in the state improve their academic achievement; and

(d) Many of the state's school districts currently lack the capacity to provide other public school choices for students whose schools are low performing.

(2) There is created the Mississippi Virtual Public School Program, which is the responsibility of the State Department of Education. It is the intent of the Legislature that the Mississippi Virtual Public School established under this section provides Mississippi families with an alternative choice to access additional educational resources in an effort to improve academic achievement. The Mississippi Virtual Public School must be recognized as a public school and provide equitable treatment and resources as are other public schools in the state. Private providers, overseen by the State Department of Education, may be selected by the State Board of Education to administer, manage or operate virtual school programs in this state, including the total operation of the Mississippi Virtual Public School Program. Any private provider chosen to provide services under the provisions of this subsection shall be chosen through a competitive RFP process.

(3) Nothing in this section may be interpreted as precluding the use of computer- and Internet-based instruction for students in a virtual or remote setting utilizing the Mississippi Virtual Public School.

(4) As used in this section, the following words and phrases have the meanings respectively ascribed unless the context clearly requires otherwise:

(a) "Mississippi Virtual Public School" means a public school in which the state uses

technology in order to deliver instruction to students via the Internet in a virtual or remote setting.

(b) "Sponsor" means the public school district is responsible for the academic process for each student including, but not limited to, enrollment, awarding of credit and monitoring progress.

(5) (a) The State Board of Education shall establish the Mississippi Virtual Public School beginning in school year 2006-2007.

(b) Students who enroll in the Mississippi Virtual Public School may reside anywhere in the State of Mississippi.

(6) Subject to appropriation, the Mississippi Virtual Public School shall provide to each student enrolled in the school all necessary instructional materials. Subject to appropriation, the sponsored school must ensure that each student is provided access to the necessary technology, such as a computer and printer, and to an Internet connection for school work purposes.

(7) The State Board of Education shall have approval authority for all coursework and policy of the Mississippi Virtual Public School.

(8) Each teacher employed by or participating in the delivery of instruction through the Mississippi Virtual Public School must meet all qualifications for licensure in the State of Mississippi.

(9) Any student who meets state residency requirements may enroll in the Mississippi Virtual Public School.

(10) Enrollment in the Mississippi Virtual Public School must be free of charge to students. The costs associated with the operations of the virtual school must be shared by the State Department of Education, subject to appropriation, and/or the local school districts.

HISTORY: SOURCES: Laws, 2006, ch. 346, § 1; Laws, 2006, ch. 504, § 10; reenacted without change, Laws, 2009, ch. 345, § 32; Laws, 2010, ch. 330, § 1; Laws, 2011, ch. 442, § 19, eff from and after July 1, 2011.