

Chapter 56: Distance Learning, Blended Learning, and Online Courses

Rule 56.1 Distance Learning, Blended Learning, and Online Courses.

The purpose of this policy is to provide guidance to Local Education Agencies (LEAs) regarding the use of distance learning, blended learning, and online courses through the **Mississippi Virtual Public School (MVPS)**, the **Digital Education Network (DEN)**, courses approved through the **Mississippi Online Course Application (MOCA)** process, and other distance learning/online course providers not already approved by the Mississippi Department of Education (MDE). The MDE does not accredit online programs or schools, but rather approves individual online courses for use in Mississippi schools.

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. **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. **An online course** is defined as a course delivered through an interactive computer-based and internet-connected learning environment by a vendor/provider 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. These courses must be approved through the MOCA process. Currently approved courses in which the content is adapted into a learning management system, delivered by a district employee/classroom teacher, and used with their students virtually or in a blended model do not require approval through the MOCA process. These online courses would be subject to local district review and would qualify for use of the face-to-face course codes found in MSIS and the Approved Courses for Secondary Schools of Mississippi.

1. The **Digital Education Network (DEN)** 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*.

2. 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. For **all online courses other than the delivery methods listed in Sections 1 and 2 above**, courses must go through the **MOCA** process for approval. LEAs must submit an

4. 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, except for courses funded through MVPS appropriation. MVPS courses must be free to students in accordance with *Miss. Code Ann. § 37-161-3*. To count as a credit toward graduation, course codes must be listed in the *Approved Courses for the Secondary Schools of Mississippi*. Additionally, online courses can only be listed upon MOCA approval. There is no limit to the number of courses a student may take. Enrollment in such courses must have prior approval by the principal.

5. Any LEA that provides **a distance learning/online program other than the delivery methods listed in Sections 1 and 2** above shall develop and implement a distance and 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 and § 37-161-3 (Adopted 10/2006; Revised 6/21/2018; Revised 7/2020)*