

Independent Study Policy (SSDA 27)

Intent of Policy

It is the intent of the Board to provide eligible students residing in the District with the opportunity to enroll in the District's independent study program as an alternative to the regular school program.

The Board adopts this policy with the awareness that excessive leniency in the terms and requirements for independent study can result in students falling so far behind their same-age peers as to increase, rather than decrease, the risk of their dropping out of school.

As such, the District shall ensure that its independent study program:

1. Is substantially equivalent in quality and in quantity to classroom instruction, such that students will be enabled to complete the District's adopted course of study within the customary time frame for completion of that course of study;
2. Provides students with the same access to existing services and resources as the other students of the District school in which the independent study student is enrolled; and
3. Ensure that students who choose to engage in independent study will have equality of rights and privileges with the students who choose to continue in the District's regular school program.

Independent Study is Voluntary

Participation in the District's independent study program is voluntary. No student may be required or coerced to enroll, participate, or continue in the independent study program without his/her consent.

Eligibility

Participation in independent study is at the discretion of the District. A student shall not be permitted to engage in independent study if the District staff members operating the independent study program determine that independent study is not an appropriate alternative for the student.

Maximum Length of Independent Study Agreement

No independent study agreement shall be valid for any period longer than one school year.

Each Student Supervised by Certificated Teacher

Each student's independent study program shall be coordinated, evaluated, and under the general supervision of a credentialed employee of the District.

All courses taught through independent study shall be under the general supervision of certificated employees of the District who hold the appropriate subject matter credential.

Maximum Length of Time for Assignments

Generally, independent study assignments shall be completed no more than one week after being assigned for all grade levels and types of program. However, when necessary based on the specific circumstances of the student's approved program, the teacher may allow for a longer period of time between the date an assignment is made and when it is due.

The absolute maximum number of days that may elapse between the time an independent study assignment is made and the date by which the student must complete the assigned work shall be 20 school days.

Conditions for Remaining in Independent Study

Students enrolled in independent study are expected to complete assignments in a timely manner and comply with their written agreement for independent study. Students may be evaluated for continued participation in the District's independent study program if they fail to meet any of the following criteria:

1. **Satisfactory Educational Progress**: A student may be evaluated for continued participation in independent study if he/she fails to demonstrate "satisfactory educational progress" as determined by all of the following indicators:
 - a. The student's achievement and engagement in the independent study program, as indicated by the student's performance on applicable pupil-level measures of pupil achievement and pupil engagement. (See Ed Code § 52060, subds (4) and (5).)
 - b. The completion of assignments, assessments, or other indicators that evidence that the student is working on assignments.
 - c. Learning required concepts, as determined by the supervising teacher; and
 - d. Progressing toward successful completion of the course of study or individual course, as determined by the supervising teacher.
2. **Missed Assignments**: A student may be evaluated for continued participation in independent study if they miss three or more assignments within a week. "Missed assignment" means any specified independent study assignment that has not been turned in, or evidenced as completed, by a student or adult education student by the due date for the assignment.

3. **Student-Teacher Communication:** Student shall communicate in person, by telephone, or by any other live visual or audio connection with the assigned certificated employee no less than twice per calendar month in order to determine whether student is making satisfactory educational progress;
4. **Compliance with Behavior Expectations:** Students must follow the rules and standards in the discipline code and behavior guidelines of the Pacific Elementary School District.
5. **Compliance with Written Agreement:** The Superintendent, or designee, may establish additional criteria for continued participation in independent study. All criteria will be clearly specified in the written agreement for independent study. A student may be evaluated for continued participation if he/she fails to follow the terms of the written agreement.

Evaluation for Continued Participation

When a student fails to meet any of the criteria set forth above, the District shall conduct an evaluation to determine whether it is in the best interests of the student to remain in the District's independent study program, or whether he or she should return to the regular school program.

If the District conducts an evaluation for the purposes of determining whether a student may remain in independent study, the written record of the findings of any evaluation shall be treated as a mandatory interim pupil record. The record shall be maintained for a period of three (3) years from the date of the evaluation and, if the student transfers to another California public school, the record shall be forwarded to that school. (See Policy SSDA 34 regarding Student Records.)

Content Aligned to Grade Level Standards

Students in the independent study program will be provided with educational content that is aligned to grade level standards and will be provided at a level of quality and intellectual challenge substantially equivalent to in-person instruction.

Procedures for Student Reengagement:

Procedures for student reengagement shall be implemented for any of the following:

1. The student is not generating attendance for more than 10 percent of the required minimum instructional time over four continuous weeks of the District's school calendar.
2. If the student is receiving synchronous instruction and is found not participatory for more than 50 percent of the scheduled times of synchronous instruction in a school

month based on the grade level of the student. A student may be found non participatory based on any of the following:

- a the time value of the student's work products, as personally judged in each instance by a certificated teacher employed by the District; or
 - b The student has been documented as not participating in scheduled live interaction or synchronous instruction for that school day.
3. The student is in violation of the terms of the written agreement for independent study.

Procedures for reengagement shall include, but are not necessarily limited to, all of the following:

1. Verification of the student's current contact information.
2. Notification to parent or guardian of nonattendance or nonparticipation (traditional independent study, only), or notification to the parent or guardian of a lack of satisfactory educational progress (course-based independent study);
3. If the District has followed the previous steps (1-2), and the student is still not generating sufficient attendance, as defined above, the District will conduct an assessment of the student's needs which will include, as appropriate, each of the following:
 - a. Contact with teacher;
 - b. Contact with the superintendent/principal;
 - c. Contact with any relevant provider of intervention or special education services;
 - d. Contact with health providers;
 - e. Contact with social services;
 - f. Contact with any other relevant agencies.
4. If the District has followed the previous steps (1-3) and the student is still not generating sufficient attendance, as defined above, then the District shall convene a parent conference to review the student's independent study agreement and to reconsider the impact that independent study is having on the student's achievement and well-being (as defined in this policy). The parent conference may include the teacher, the principal/superintendent, and, as appropriate, the student.
5. If the District has followed steps 1-4 and the student is still not generating sufficient attendance, as defined above, then the District may refer the student and family to the Santa Cruz County Student Attendance Review Board (SARB).

Grade-Level Plans for Synchronous Instruction

The District will develop plans for synchronous instruction as follows:

1. For students in transitional kindergarten, kindergarten, and grades 1 to 3, inclusive, a plan to provide opportunities for daily synchronous instruction for all students throughout the school year;
2. For students in grades 4 to 6, inclusive, a plan to provide opportunities for both daily live interaction and at least weekly synchronous instruction for all students throughout the school year.

Transition Back to In-Person Instruction

If a parent or guardian wants their child to return to in-person instruction from independent study, they shall send a written request to the teacher and registrar indicating the name of the student and the earliest date on which they would like the student to return to in-person instruction. If vaccine laws have been complied with, the District shall return the student to an in-person program within five instructional days of the date it receives the parent or guardian's written request. Nothing in this policy shall otherwise affect the District's policies governing placement and transfer of students.

Written Agreement for Independent Study

The District shall fully execute a written agreement for independent study. If a student is scheduled to participate in independent study for fewer than 15 school days, the written agreement for independent study will be executed within 10 school days of the student's enrollment in independent study. If a student is scheduled to participate in independent study for more than 14 school days, then written agreement for independent study will be executed before the student is enrolled in independent study. The written agreement will be specific to each student and shall include all of the following:

1. The manner, time, frequency, and place by which:
 - a. the student shall submit assignments;
 - b. student progress shall be reported; and
 - c. the District shall communicate with parent or guardian regarding the student's academic progress
2. The objectives and methods of study for the student's work, and the methods utilized to evaluate that work;

3. The specific resources, including materials and personnel, that will be made available to the student. These resources shall include confirming or providing access to all students to the connectivity and devices adequate to participate in the educational program and complete assigned work;
4. A statement of the District's policies regarding:
 - a. The maximum length of time allowed between the assignment and the completion of the student's assigned work. The Superintendent, or designee, may also include any special circumstances specific to the individual student that allow for greater time to complete assignments;
 - b. The level of satisfactory educational progress; and
 - c. The number of missed assignments allowed before an evaluation of whether or not 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. No independent study agreement shall be valid for any period longer than one (1) school year;
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 detailing the academic and other supports that will be provided to address the needs of students who are not performing at grade level, or need support in other areas, such as English learners, individuals with exceptional needs in order to be consistent with the student's individualized education program or plan pursuant to Section 504 of the federal Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (29 U.S.C. Sec. 794), students in foster care or experiencing homelessness, and students requiring mental health supports.
8. A statement that participation in the District's independent study program 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 due to expulsion or suspension, the agreement shall 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; and

9. The written agreement must be signed and dated by the following individuals:
 - a. The student;
 - b. If the student is under 18 years of age, the student’s parent, guardian, or caregiver;
 - c. The certificated employee who the District has designated as having responsibility for the general supervision of the student’s independent study; and
 - d. If applicable, the certificated employee who the District has designated as having responsibility for the student’s special education programming.

Written agreements may be signed using an electronic signature that complies with state and federal standards. The use of an electronic signature shall have the same force and effect as the use of a manual signature if the requirements for digital signatures and their acceptable technology, as provided in Section 16.5 of the Government Code and in Chapter 10 (commencing with Section 22000) of Division 7 of Title 2 of the California Code of Regulations, are satisfied.

Electronic File

The District may maintain the signed written agreement, supplemental agreements, assignment records, work samples, and attendance records assessing time value of work or evidence that an instructional activity occurred as an electronic file.

An “electronic file” includes a computer or electronic stored image of an original document, including, but not limited to, portable document format (PDF), JPEG, or other digital image file type, that may be sent via fax machine, email, or other electronic means.

Either an original document or an electronic file of the original document is allowable documentation for auditing purposes.

Restrictions On Funding and/or Supplies

No student shall be prohibited from participating in the District’s independent study program solely on the basis that they do not have the materials, equipment, or Internet access that are necessary to participate in the independent study course.

Students participating in the District’s independent study program may be provided with educational materials, equipment, etc., as needed to support them in their program. However, the District shall not provide a student or their parent or guardian with funds or any other thing of value that a school district could not legally provide to a similarly situated student in the District.

(Ed. Code, §§ 49915, 48917, 51747 *et seq.*; Title 5 Cal. Code Regs. §§ 11700 *et seq.*)