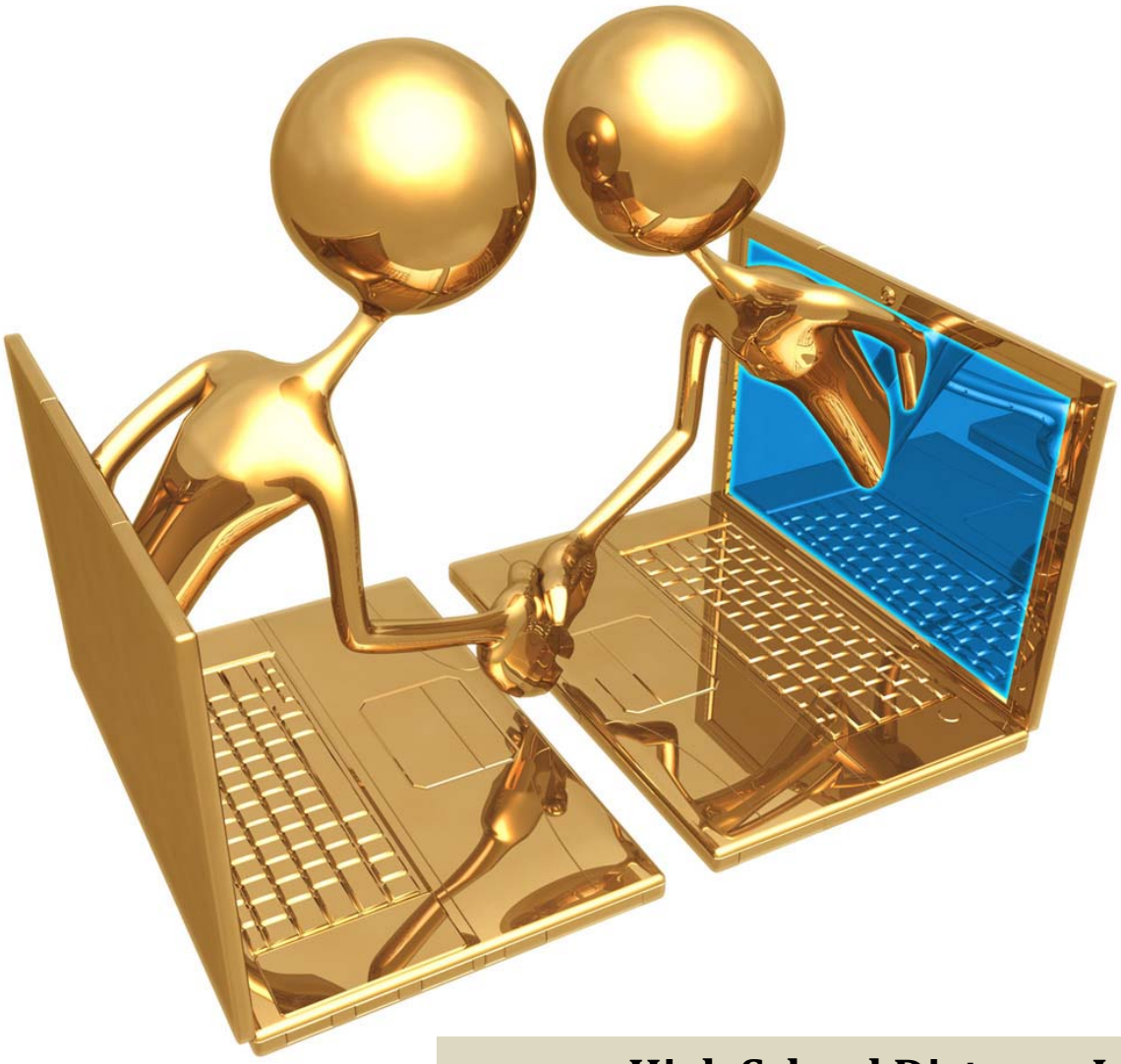

High School Distance Learning: Online/Technology Enhanced Course or Experience Guidance

Provided by: Technology Initiatives and Curriculum and Instruction
Alabama Department of Education

High School Graduation Distance Learning: Online/Technology Enhanced Course or Experience Guidance

Provided By: Technology Initiatives and Curriculum and Instruction, Alabama Department of Education

As part of the First Choice Diploma program all students prior to graduation are required to participate in an online course or experience.

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Distance Learning: Effective for students entering the ninth grade in the 2009-2010 school year, Alabama students will be required to complete one online/technology enhanced course or experience prior to graduation. Exceptions through Individualized Education Plans will be allowed.

This document has been designed to provide guidance in identifying and creating an online learning experience.

An online experience for this purpose is defined as a structured learning environment that utilizes technology—consistently and regularly—with Intranet/Internet-based tools and resources as the delivery method for instruction, research, assessment, and communication.

Alabama High School Graduation Requirements:

A student may satisfy the online requirement for graduation through one or more of the following options:

1. Take an online course
2. Participate in online experiences incorporated into courses used to fulfill requirements for graduation.

For the online experience to be successful and to meet the online graduation requirement, it must meet the following standards:

1. Be relevant and address many learning styles appropriate to the task.
2. Include asynchronous and/or synchronous interaction between teacher and student as well as student and student.
3. Incorporate resources outside of the classroom.
4. Incorporate the following:
   a. **Use** of technology tools for managing and communicating personal information.
   b. **Apply** advanced software features such as built-in thesaurus, templates, and styles to improve the appearance of word processing documents, spreadsheets, and presentations.
   c. **Identify** and **describe** various telecommunications or online technologies such as desktop conferencing, listservs, blogs, and virtual reality.
   d. **Incorporate** a variety of media and formats to **design**, **develop**, **publish**, and **present** products.
   e. **Collaborate** in content-related projects that integrate a variety of media.
   f. **Demonstrate proficiency** in the use of emerging technology resources such as podcasting, Webcasting, compressed video delivery, online file sharing, graphing calculators, and global positioning software.

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Essential Characteristics of Quality Online Learning Experiences:

A quality online learning experience will be a combination of structured, sustained, integrated, and meaningful learning activities accessed via an information technology network, thus preparing students with skills needed for business and industry, continuing education, and life-long learning.

Quality online learning experiences have common characteristics:

- The online experience is aligned with appropriate content standards and addresses multiple intelligences and various learning styles.
- The online experience advocates, models, and teaches safe, legal, and ethical use of digital information and technology, including respect for copyright and intellectual property and the appropriate documentation of sources.
- All participants abide by the district's Acceptable Use Policy.
- The teacher is involved as a mentor, facilitator, and instructional leader experienced in 21st Century Technology Skills.
- Participants engage in collaborative online learning projects, discussions, and assessments beyond the traditional classroom that are goal oriented, focused, project-based, and inquiry-oriented.
- 21st Century technologies and resources, a variety of rich media, and advanced software features are accessible to all students.
- An online course/learning management system should be utilized to support global learning opportunities and to facilitate management of online experiences.
- The experiences provide rigorous lessons and structured learning environments with consistent and regular access to emerging technologies.
- Districts comply with the requirements of Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 to ensure accessibility for all students.
- The online experience must be consistent and regular, lasting 20 hours or more.
- The online experience includes a monitoring plan.
- To incorporate the online experience into the required computer applications course, it must meet both of the following:
    - Be included in a full credit course that also includes all criteria for the online experience
    - Be taken in Grades 9 - 12
- An online experience must involve collaboration among students in content-related projects that integrate a variety of media, thus a computer-assisted software program does not meet the definition of an online experience.

Online Learning Delivery Formats

I. **Web-Based Instruction**— Teacher led through a virtual environment. An asynchronous format makes use of Web-based course/learning management systems to create an online learning environment for students. This includes the ACCESS model, online dual credit

classes, and other distance learning ***courses***. The online teacher serves as a mentor and instructional leader and actively engages participants in the learning process. They provide feedback in a timely manner, administer assessments, and establish timelines. This format requires participants to have strong computer skills and social networking abilities that include but are not limited to email, chat rooms, webinars, and threaded discussions.

II. **Blended Enhanced Online Instruction**— Teacher led through both face-to-face and a virtual environment. A traditional online course is aligned with the Alabama Course of Study and managed through a virtual environment (course/learning management system) to provide a flexible, interactive platform for the teacher to communicate, assign, and distribute materials. This delivery method enables teachers to provide immediate feedback, collaborate with students, and actively engage participants in the learning process. Connecting Web-based resources and emerging and advanced technologies to the traditional classroom facilitates the development of 21st Century learners. Teachers utilizing this type of instruction engage learners in 21st Century skills with virtual learning opportunities. In order for the experience to be meaningful and to develop technological competencies, research has shown that the participant's experience must be consistent and regular, lasting 20 hours or more.

Blended learning is a mix of synchronous and asynchronous instructor-designed online experiences. The delivery of the synchronous instruction may involve a teacher in the classroom or a teacher via interactive videoconferencing (IVC). Teachers that engage in blended instruction use a Web-based course/learning management system as an extension of the classroom. This delivery combines the communication benefits of a traditional classroom and connects it to emerging technology-based tools and resources. This blended format can provide opportunities for student work outside the classroom in virtual teams with students from other schools or classrooms to learn writing, research, teamwork, and technology skills.

Guidelines for Online Teachers

derived from SREB Guidelines for Online Teachers

The online teacher must hold a valid Alabama Teaching Certificate in the area of the online course content.

The online teacher should also successfully meet one of the following requirements in order to teach an online course or experience:

1. ACCESS Distance Learning Training for Online Teachers
2. Alabama eLearning for Educators Course Instructor*
3. Alabama eLearning for Educators Online Facilitation (for Instructors)
4. Intel Master Teacher for Essentials Online

5. LEA approved – must be trained in online pedagogy, meet the following standards, and demonstrate:
    a. The ability to effectively use word processing, spreadsheet, and presentation software.
    b. Effective use of Internet browser, email applications, appropriate online software, and online digital citizenship.
    c. The ability to effectively incorporate subject-specific resources.
    d. Technology knowledge and skills in order to stay current with emerging technologies.
    e. The ability to plan, design, and incorporate strategies to encourage active learning, interaction, participation, and collaboration in the online environment.

*This 10-week online course will be offered free to any public high school teacher starting in the summer of 2009. Fifty-five hours of professional development will be awarded upon successful completion of the course. To register: Go to https://pdweb.alsde.edu; search for PD Title #: EDU6611.

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Q&As

1. What is an online experience?

   An online experience for this purpose is defined as a structured learning environment that utilizes technology—consistently and regularly—with Internet-based tools and resources as the delivery method for instruction, research, assessment, and communication.

2. Are all high school students required to participate in an online course or experience?

   Yes, beginning with 2009-2010 ninth-grade class.

3. Will a student fail to graduate if he does not participate in an online course or experience?

   Yes, unless an exception is made through an Individualized Education Plan.

4. How many credits does a student earn for an online experience?

   The online experience is to be documented. Credit is earned for a course that is taken online or a course that incorporates an online experience.

5. Will the distance learning requirement be recorded as a class on the student's permanent record?

   The LEA should develop policies to address the tracking and recording on permanent records of the distance learning requirement.

6. If a student writes a research paper for a required course using the Internet, will this activity qualify as an online experience?

   No, there must be collaboration involved using a variety of media and managed through a virtual environment.

7. If a student participates in an online course with ACCESS, does the ACCESS course satisfy the online requirement?

   Yes.

8. If a student took an online course earning dual credit at a participating university or college, will that experience while the student is in high school qualify as an online experience?

   Yes, if it meets the definitions in this document.

9. Can the online technology experience be distributed over several courses with each teacher teaching only parts of the experience?
   No, as there are not course of study standards tied to the online experience that can be distributed over several courses; the online experience is a method of instructional delivery and student collaboration.

10. If a teacher uses blogging or STI assessments in a course, does that qualify as an online experience for the student?
    No, not by itself.

11. Does participation in FaceBook or YouTube qualify as an online experience?
    No, not by itself.

12. The science teacher requires her students to use laptops to make podcasts. Is this an online experience?
    No, not by itself.

13. What kinds of technology hardware and software does a student need to participate in an online experience?
    Access to a computer and log-in to a managed virtual environment.

14. Can a student earn credit for an online experience without a teacher?
    No.

15. Is there an exit exam for the online experience?
    No.