

ACCESS Distance Learning Frequently Asked Questions

Q: What is the ACCESS Distance Learning program?

A: ACCESS Distance Learning (Alabama Connecting Classrooms, Educators, and Students Statewide) is an education initiative of the Alabama Department of Education. It provides opportunities and options for Alabama public high school students to engage in Advanced Placement (AP), elective, and other courses to which they may not otherwise have access or be able to schedule. Additional information may be found at <http://accessdl.state.al.us>.

Q: Who can enroll in an ACCESS Distance Learning course?

A: ACCESS Distance Learning courses are available to students who meet the following criteria:

- Enrolled in Grades 9-12 in an Alabama public high school
- Identified as a special education student in a state correctional facility and registered with an Alabama public high school.

Q: Is there a student charge for ACCESS Distance Learning courses?

A: No. Courses are provided at no cost to students enrolled in an Alabama public high school (Grades 9-12).

Q: Where are ACCESS Distance Learning courses delivered?

A: All courses are offered at school or at a location provided by the school during the normal school day under state rules established to govern the program.

Q: What are the responsibilities of the school and school system that participates in the ACCESS program?

A: It is the responsibility of local schools/school systems to provide computers, Internet connections, software, and textbooks required for specific courses. Schools must also develop local policies and provide onsite classroom facilitators to assist students during regular class periods. Other responsibilities include:

- Monitoring students' progress
- Honor points, weighting, and other special considerations may be taken into account at the local level.
- Following policies regarding enrollment, prerequisites, withdrawals, dropping of classes, student behavior, lab safety, communication, professional development, technology and Internet use, registration, and special needs students (For detailed information, see "Requirements of Participating Schools" in the ACCESS Distance Learning policies-
<http://accessdl.state.al.us/showaccess.php?lnk=policies->

Q: Who teaches ACCESS Distance Learning courses?

A: All ACCESS Distance Learning courses are taught by experienced teachers who

- Hold Alabama certification in their content areas
- Are highly qualified in the content areas they teach
- Meet background check requirements (including fingerprinting)
- Complete ongoing professional development provided by ACCESS Distance Learning

Q: Does the onsite classroom facilitator in the receiving site need to be a certified teacher?

A: No. The onsite classroom facilitator does not have to be a certified teacher. At a minimum, a facilitator must be an (1) adult supervisor and (2) have professional training in online methodology and technical aspects of Web-based instruction, including safety and lab procedures if applicable. Onsite classroom facilitators or paraprofessionals in Title I schools must be under the direct supervision of a certified teacher who is in close proximity to the distance learning classroom. Facilitators must also meet any requirements set forth in local school system policies to work in a school setting with students.

Q: Are the interactive videoconferencing (IVC) and online Advanced Placement (AP) courses as rigorous as conventional AP courses?

A: Yes. The IVC Advanced Placement courses are taught by experienced teachers who have had AP training. Students receive the same instruction that teachers provide for their face-to-face students. Online Advanced Placement courses are also taught by teachers who have had AP training and are experienced in AP teaching. Studies have shown that students taking the AP exam after taking a course online do as well as students in traditional classrooms.

Q: When do classes begin and end?

A: ACCESS Distance Learning courses are taught at school during the regular school day. Students, therefore, follow the local school calendar. Students taking IVC courses are placed in classes that closely match the local school calendar. Students taking online or Web-based courses may be scheduled by local schools into classes in the same way that local students are scheduled into classes that are taught onsite.

Q: How do students register for courses?

A: All requests for placement in ACCESS Distance Learning courses are made by local high school counselors. Counselors are able to request courses online through the ACCESS online registration console by accessing the link found at <http://accessdl.state.al.us>.

Q: What are the characteristics of successful online learners?

A: Some of the characteristics of more successful Web-based learners include being independent learners, computer literate individuals, and effective written communicators.

Q: What is the difference between online and IVC courses?

A: Online or Web-based courses are asynchronous (do not need to be taught in “real time”). They utilize a Web site portal, multimedia content, and an instructor (e-teacher). Participating schools may offer these courses at any time during the normal school day. In these courses, students work individually at computers during the school day and the e-teachers grade assignments, check e-mails, and send correspondence to students via technology at night. Students send their assignments to their teachers to be graded and communicate with their teachers via the ACCESS learning management system, e-mail, telephone, videoconference, or Web conference. Schools must provide each student with a school-based, reliable, Internet-connected computer.

IVC courses are synchronous courses (taught at a designated time established by the sending school). These include real-time (two-way audio/two-way video) instruction and an Alabama-certified e-teacher. Students in these courses receive instruction (at a distance) from a teacher who is teaching the course to his or her face-to-face students. The IVC students are enrolled in the teacher’s class, but they receive instruction via technology. To participate, schools must provide access to an IVC equipped, H.323 standard school lab, and a reliable Internet-connected computer.

Q: What are the technical requirements for ACCESS Distance Learning IVC courses? Online courses?

A: To receive or send ACCESS Distance Learning IVC courses, a school must have a distance learning lab with videoconferencing equipment, ability to connect to multiple sites, and adequate bandwidth to handle the transmissions. To receive an online course, students must have a computer and high speed access to the Internet.

Q: Do ACCESS Distance Learning courses satisfy NCAA core-course requirements?

A: All ACCESS Distance Learning core courses meet Alabama Course of Study standards. The State Department of Education is currently seeking statewide approval from the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) for ACCESS core courses. Individual schools can apply for approval from the NCAA using the process outlined by the NCAA.

Q: What courses are offered by ACCESS Distance Learning?

A: A list of available course offerings may be found at <http://accessdl.state.al.us>.

Q: What is expected of a distance learning student?

A: Students are expected to participate in daily learning activities such as discussions, projects, labs, group work, writing workshops, and assessments. They must possess the required prerequisites for any course taken and abide by all ACCESS Distance Learning student policies (drop, privacy, academic integrity, code of conduct, netiquette/acceptable use, and others).

Q: Will International Baccalaureate (IB) courses be taught through ACCESS?

A: At this time, there are no plans to include International Baccalaureate (IB) courses in the ACCESS Distance Learning program. Only students enrolled in an IB World School may participate in an IB program. (See the IB Web site: <http://www.ibo.org/faq/>.)

Q: Will textbooks be used in ACCESS Distance Learning courses?

A: Interactive videoconferencing courses use the textbook designated by the sending/delivery teacher. Most online courses that require a textbook utilize a Web-based or CD version. It is the responsibility of the local school/school system to provide the required textbooks and ancillary materials needed for each distance learning class.

Q: Can ACCESS Distance Learning courses be used to help Alabama public high schools accommodate the needs of students transferring from other scheduling options, such as moving from a block schedule to a seven-period day?

A: Yes. ACCESS Distance Learning courses may assist students who are transitioning from one type of schedule to another, but it remains the responsibility of the school and student to select courses based on individual needs of students.

Q: Can receiving schools change grades issued by e-teachers?

A: No. All grades assigned by ACCESS Distance Learning teachers are official. Participating schools will accept the numerical grades assigned by ACCESS teachers for inclusion on students' transcripts and will ensure that the assigned grades are recorded by the facilitators or counselors in accordance with local policy. Honor points, weighting, and other special considerations will be made in accordance with established LEA policy.

Q: How will science labs be conducted in ACCESS receiving sites? What are the requirements of the lab facilitator?

A: Labs are required for all science courses may include both virtual labs and hands-on laboratory experiences. Hands-on labs will be facilitated only by teachers who have training in the proper and safe handling and use of laboratory equipment. The local receiving school will be responsible for securing a lab facilitator. Adequate supervision must be provided for all hands-on laboratory activities. These labs may be handled in a variety of ways at receiving sites. Ideally, a science teacher at the receiving site who is teaching other science courses may facilitate the lab activities. A biology teacher, for example, may facilitate labs for one or two students taking AP Chemistry in a small rural school. The lab facilitator will not be responsible for day-to-day activities in the receiving classroom. Additionally, SDE and/or local school officials will assist schools in leveraging other existing resources when possible. These might include Science in Motion and local community/college/university lab facilitators, as appropriate, to ensure appropriateness of content and the safety of students in laboratory activities.

Q: Will grading information be available for receiving schools?

A: Grading information will be available from online and IVC teachers for schools enrolling students in both Web-based and interactive videoconferencing courses.