



Determining Attendance and Alternatives to Seat-Time

BY SUSAN PATRICK & ALEXIS CHAMBERS

States are grappling with policy strategies to determine attendance in the era of COVID-19 school closures and remote learning. Allowing districts and schools to develop an attendance policy using a combination of options to determine attendance can offer maximum flexibility. These options include, but are not limited to:

- Time on task (task can include engagement);
- Participation; evidence of student work; and
- Competency-based attainment with demonstrations of building skills, competencies, and knowledge.

This issue brief contains examples of state policy examples for creating attendance policies for learning remotely, including competency-based attainment.



BACKGROUND

States can ask districts to develop policies to determine attendance based on a regular assessment as to whether a child is progressing on a regular basis toward goals based on contact with teachers, mentors, advisors, and other coordinators in programs; completion of assigned work; participation in synchronous remote events or meetings; engagement; and other evidence of progress.

States are considering new metrics for attendance given different delivery models, extended learning opportunities, and virtual learning environments. Some states use performance-based attendance measures, which are flexible in measuring attendance outside of the classroom. These measures may include the number of meetings with instructional and support staff, the number of successfully completed assignments or lesson plans, or the amount of time spent actively engaged in a virtual learning environment. Attendance may be measured based on minutes of instruction, time logged in, performance on assessments, competency achievement, demonstration of skills, building academic knowledge, or other factors.

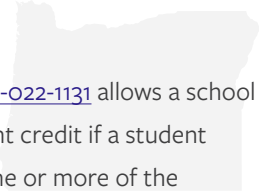
Developing simple counts of student attendance during COVID-19 school closures may be less educationally meaningful than investing in strategies that boost student motivation, thereby increasing engagement.

One example comes from schools with strong advisory systems, who report that having advisors call their advisees daily to check in about academic progress and challenges, as well as student's well-being, greatly strengthens the student's engagement. This strategy typically requires using most or all school staff members as advisors, not just classroom teachers, to have a more manageable ratio of advisors to students. Schools without existing advisory systems could nonetheless create advisory groupings in the remote environment and begin developing the relationships that make this strategy effective.



State Examples

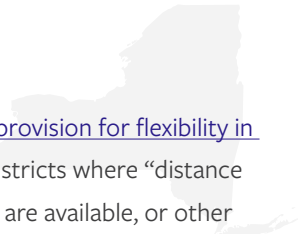
Oregon



[Oregon Administrative Code 581-022-1131](#) allows a school district or charter school to grant credit if a student demonstrates mastery by any one or more of the following ways:

- Successfully completing classroom or equivalent work designed to measure proficiency in class or out of class, where hours of instruction may vary;
- Successfully passing an appropriate exam designed to measure proficiency or mastery of identified standards;
- Providing a collection of work or other evidence which demonstrates proficiency or mastery of identified standards; and/or
- Providing documentation of prior learning activities or experiences which demonstrate proficiency or mastery.

New York



New York State has a policy [provision for flexibility in seat-time requirements](#). In districts where “distance and online learning methods are available, or other continuity of learning strategies are utilized, the priority for the instruction should be that which best prepares students to meet the learning outcomes for the course... Any student who achieves the learning outcomes for the

course should earn the applicable course/diploma credit without regard to the 180-minute/week unit of study requirement in Commissioner’s Regulations Part 100.1.”

According to the New York City Department of Education, there is flexibility for teachers to work with school leaders and teams to define what daily meaningful interaction with students looks like.

Student interaction can include, but isn’t limited to:

- Student submission of an assignment or completion of an assessment, in whichever manner the school is collecting;
- Student participation in an online forum, chat log, or discussion thread;
- Student/family phone call, email, or response to teacher email;
- Phone, email, and/or other digital communication with a family member who confirms student interaction/engagement; and
- Other evidence of participation as determined by the principal.

All New York City public schools now have access to a centralized system for monitoring, tracking, and reporting student engagement and interaction that will be collected as attendance [during remote learning while schools are closed due to the coronavirus \(COVID-19\) outbreak](#).

New Hampshire



The New Hampshire Department of Education provides the following [guidance on remote learning](#): “A school district...may conduct instruction remotely. The district shall create a plan that shall include procedures for participation by all students. Academic work shall be equivalent in effort and rigor to typical classroom work. There shall be an assessment of all student work for the day.”

New Hampshire has an active online competency-based school, the [Virtual Academy Online Learning Charter School](#), or VLACS. VLACS [defines attendance](#) as the following:

- The completion of a minimum of five credits per school year. The school year is defined as July 1 - June 30 *and*,
- Continuous participation in all courses including Advisory.

Maine



Regional School Unit 24 (RSU 24) in Maine states: “Upon careful reflection of student performance data, RSU 24 believes that a change is necessary in our educational system. Proficiency-Based Education (PBE) is a shift from the traditional model of school, which is based on requiring a certain amount of attendance in a prescribed set of classes, to one that focuses on the attainment of specific skills and knowledge (competencies). We believe this change will better prepare our students for college and/or career readiness.”

The state education agency states that “A total of at least 175 instructional days are required” for Maine virtual students. However, “There is no hourly requirement, per day or per year. Local agencies and schools are asked to declare how they will determine this, but it is not prescribed by the state.”

Minnesota



The [Minnesota Online Truancy Collaborative](#) sets standards and guidance for ensuring attendance is met at an adequate level, and students are making progress in their learning objectives. Among the objectives for [Minnesota Virtual Schools](#) on attendance policies are that:

- Students are required to meet weekly progress expectations.
- Mathematical formulas determine if students have met expectations or not.
 - ▶ 25% overall progress increase each week
 - ▶ 5% increase each day 5x/week
 - ▶ Total from all classes
 - ▶ Log-in time (approximately 20-25 hours of documented time online per week) is secondary but still important.
- Progress is translated into days for the traditional truancy model.
- They are able to comply with truancy intervention programs.
- Students benefit from the interventions.
- Course completion rates have been positively impacted.

Florida



Florida Virtual School (FLVS), the nation’s largest and oldest state-run online school, [defines attendance](#) with the following policies:

- FLVS students must meet the state’s compulsory attendance requirements, but regardless of the hours a student completes before the last day of school, they must meet the weekly required instructional hours up until the last day of school.
- To meet the state’s [attendance requirements](#), FLVS recommends that K-3 students complete

a minimum of four hours per day, 20 hours per week, and 720 hours per year of schooling. Students in grades 4-12 should spend a minimum of five hours per day, 25 hours per week, and 900 hours per year.

- The Student Information System (SIS) tracks a student's documented attendance, but if a student has not completed enough work or they have not met other school requirements, the attendance record can be invalidated.

Students remain in "Good Academic Standing" based on several factors, including tracked student daily log-ins, the amount of communication with teachers, weekly assignment submissions, and progress, based on course pace charts and course completion percentages.

Indiana

In 2019, Indiana passed [S.B. 567](#), which requires students to complete virtual school's annual onboarding process and orientation with their guardian before enrolling. The bill directs virtual school authorizers to develop minimum requirements for the annual onboarding process, methods for tracking and monitoring student progress, engagement, counseling policies, and professional development plans. It also mandates that virtual schools withdraw students identified as habitually truant. Lastly, the legislation requires virtual schools to submit an annual report that includes the methodology for determining attendance and policies for student engagement, in addition to attendance records.

Oklahoma

In 2017, Oklahoma passed [S.B. 244](#), which directs each virtual school to develop an attendance policy using the completion of instructional activities and progress toward course completion as metrics of instructional activities are defined as online log-ins to curricula or programs, offline activities, completed assignments, and testing. Instructional activities also include face-to-face

communications or virtual meetings with virtual charter school service providers. If a student accumulates more than 10 absences, the virtual school must submit a report to the student's parents or legal guardian.

Texas

The [Texas Virtual School Network](#) (TxVSN) is the state virtual school network that offers full-time virtual learning for grades 3-12. Each TxVSN course is considered to be 55 minutes of daily instructional time. Students are provided with individualized schedules of required online classes and tutorial sessions they are expected. Parents are also expected to document and monitor a student's time spent on learning material.

Wisconsin

A Wisconsin [statute](#) for online schools requires schools to notify a parent or guardian when a student has failed to respond appropriately to a school assignment from a staff member within five school days. Districts have the flexibility to define attendance in local policy. Furthermore, districts are strongly encouraged to have a separate local attendance policy for virtual and blended course offerings, if applicable. These offerings may use nontraditional data, such as course progress, engagement, synchronous instructional time, system activity, and student logs, to create an equivalency that can meet the rules of traditional reporting. Districts will also need to confirm that the attendance policy can be supported by their student information system.

- Wisconsin - [Habitual Truancy, Failure to Participate \(Virtual Charter Schools\) and Expulsion](#)
- Wisconsin - [Answers to Frequently Asked Compulsory School Attendance Questions](#)

Additional Seat-Time and Instructional Time Examples and Resources

Below are examples of states using seat-time as one of many policies to advance personalized, competency-based education.

Arkansas: [Act 601](#) creates the [Districts and Schools of Innovation](#) program through which districts can request flexibility from seat-time requirements.

North Carolina: The [NC State Board of Ed Policy Manual, GCS-M-001](#) allows that “Credit by Demonstrated Mastery shall be available for all NC students in grades 9-12 for high school courses and in grades 6-8 for high school courses offered in middle school.”

In **South Carolina**, [H.B. 3759](#), includes language to define competency-based education and allows schools transitioning to CBE to request waivers from laws,

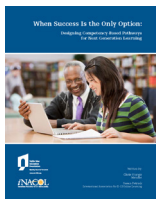
rules, and regulations impeding implementation. The [South Carolina Office of Personalized Learning](#) leads transformative work to support personalized learning for students and increase educator capacity for innovative teaching and learning.

Wisconsin’s [WS 118.33\(1\)\(d\)](#) enables a school board to grant a high school diploma to a student who has not completed traditional credit hour requirements if the student is enrolled in an [alternative education program](#) and the school board determines the student has demonstrated a level of proficiency equivalent to that which he or she would have attained if he or she had satisfied the requirements under traditional high school requirements.

Suggested Reading



The Aurora Institute issue brief [Future Focused State Policy Actions to Transform K-12 Education](#) identifies the top issues to address in state policy for transforming our K-12 education system.



The Aurora Institute report [When Success Is the Only Option: Designing Competency-Based Pathways for Next Generation Learning](#) discusses different types of credit flexibility.



The [Education Commission of the States](#) published a [50-state comparison](#) that provides data on the days and instructional hours required by the state.



The Aurora Institute report, [Education Policy Issues for the COVID-19 Era: Policy Actions and Responses to Leverage the Moment for Future Readiness](#), identifies 10 issues education leaders are using to leverage COVID-19 for a transformed k-12 education system.



The 2019 [CompetencyWorks](#) map shows the number of states with seat-time or credit flexibility.

Suggested Citation

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