DISTANCE LEARNING QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

BASED ON THE PROVISIONS OF RULE 10

DISTANCE LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES

Improvements and innovations in communication technologies have enabled Nebraska schools to connect to teachers and learning experiences far beyond their own walls. Distance learning has grown from the early Educational TV broadcasts to a border-to-border network of consortiums providing a wide range of classes to hundreds of students. Live, interactive audiovisual formats link teachers and students in real-time (synchronous) learning activities, greatly expanding curricula and learning opportunities across the state. The Internet continues to grow as an education medium, offering more options for schools and students. No longer must class choices be dictated primarily by the class schedule, because the Internet is always "open" and ready for students to log on from home or elsewhere at any time (asynchronous).

As promising as these advances are, they also present problems, such as equity of access, which each school must address. Another concern, of course, is establishing and implementing a quality assurance system that will enable schools to add distance learning courses to their curricula with a necessary level of confidence in their quality. Part of that confidence derives from the amount and kind of cooperation and communication that occurs between distance learning teachers and local teacher-monitors.

RULE 10, REGULATIONS AND PROCEDURES FOR THE ACCREDITATION OF SCHOOLS (the official version of the rule is available on the Nebraska Secretary of State's Rules and Regulations webpage), is rather straightforward in its provisions for distance learning (the relevant sections are 004.04D through 004.04D2b). Those sections ask of distance learning generally the same requirements for qualified staffing that Rule 10 has traditionally insisted upon for locally taught classes. That being true, however, questions have been raised that deserve answers. The following are frequently asked questions and answers about staffing and monitoring of distance learning courses.

1. **How many distance learning courses may a school include in its curriculum offerings?**
   Up to 200 of the required 400 instructional units may be provided through distance learning options described in sections 004.04D-004.04D2b. There are, however, limits within the various forms of distance learning. Synchronous interactive audio-visual arrangements, for example, are limited to 100 instructional units. (After the 400-unit requirement is met, a school may offer additional distance learning courses.)

2. **Is there a minimum enrollment requirement?**
   At least one student must be enrolled in the course and receive a grade for it to count toward instructional units.

3. **What monitoring of student progress is required?**
   Students enrolled in a synchronous interactive audio-visual distance learning course are monitored by the instructor. Students in courses delivered via asynchronous means will be assigned to a local or off-site teacher who holds a Nebraska Teaching Certificate with an appropriate endorsement and monitors the overall appropriateness of the course and each student's progress.

4. **Must a teacher be present in each classroom during the delivery of a synchronous class?**
   A local teacher or paraprofessional must be present in the classroom unless the off-site teacher holds a Nebraska Teaching Certificate, maintains two-way audio and video communication with the classroom, and has a direct connection with a supervising adult in the school.

5. **May college and university instructors teach distance learning classes if they are not Nebraska certificated?**
   No. By State Statute, only Nebraska certificated teachers may serve as teachers in K-12 schools

6. **How many classes offered by University of Nebraska High School (UNHS) can be counted as curricular offerings?**
   Up to 50 of the allowable 200 instructional units may be provided through classes received from UNHS. This includes those classes delivered through UNHS's online class management system.

7. **May classes delivered via the computer be counted as part of the curriculum?**
   Yes. Up to 30 of the allowable 200 instructional units may be provided by courses delivered via the computer, provided schools meet the provisions of paragraphs 8, 9, and 10 (following).
   (NOTE: These classes may be in addition to those on-line classes of University of Nebraska High School)

8. **What responsibility does the school have in improving computer courses?**
   Each course must be reviewed and recommended by a committee comprising at least one local teacher and one local administrator and approved by the board or governing body. The written review is to be on file in the school.
   (NOTE: Courses are not required to be approved by the Nebraska Department of Education.)

9. **What other responsibilities does the school have if it includes computer-delivered courses as part of its curriculum?**
   A class period must be included in the high school schedule, and a certificated teacher must be present during that period to monitor and assist with instruction. (More than one computer-delivered course may be offered simultaneously in the same period.) Additionally, each student enrolled in such a course must be assigned to a local or off-site teacher who holds a Nebraska Teaching Certificate with an appropriate endorsement and monitors the student's progress and the course's general appropriateness.

10. **How does the school indicate and report distance learning courses?**
    Each course is listed on the high school class schedule. College teachers (with the appropriate certificate or permit) and on-site teachers will be listed in the school's NSSRS Staff Reporting via the NDE Portal.

Office of Educational Effectiveness,
Nebraska Department of Education
P.O. Box 94987
Lincoln, NE 68509-4987
E-mail: nde.accreditation@nebraska.gov
Web: http://www.education.ne.gov/APAC/