

## SANTA CRUZ COUNTY OFFICE OF EDUCATION

**Instruction**

**Board Policy 6158 (a)**

### INDEPENDENT STUDY

#### **Purpose**

The Santa Cruz County Board of Education (the County Board) authorizes independent study as an optional alternative instructional strategy for pupils whose needs may be best met through study outside of the regular classroom setting. Independent study shall offer a means of individualizing the educational plan to serve pupils who desire a more challenging educational experience, whose health or other personal circumstances make classroom attendance difficult, who are unable to access course(s) due to scheduling problems, and/or who need to make up credits or fill gaps in their learning.

The Superintendent or designee may provide a variety of independent study opportunities, including, but not limited to, through a program or class within a comprehensive school, an alternative school or program of choice, a charter school, and an online course. The County Board recognizes that by offering a range of quality options, including classroom-based, hybrid, and non-classroom based programs, instruction is better tailored to meet pupils' needs, thereby improving academic outcomes.

A pupil's participation in independent study shall be voluntary. (Education Code 51747, 51749.5)

Independent study for each pupil shall be under the general supervision of the principal or designee or a district employee who possesses a valid certification document pursuant to Education Code 44865 or an emergency credential pursuant to Education Code 44300, registered by law. pupils' independent study shall be coordinated, evaluated, and documented, as prescribed by law and reflected in the accompanying administrative regulation. (Education Code 51747.5)

The minimum period of time for any independent study option shall be three consecutive school days. (Education Code 46300(e)(1))

An individual with exceptional needs, as defined in Education Code Section 56026, may participate in independent study, if the pupil's individualized education program (IEP specifically provides for that participation. If a parent or guardian of an individual with exceptional needs requests independent study, the pupil's individualized education program team shall make an individualized determination as to whether the pupil can receive a free appropriate public education (FAPE) in an independent study placement. A pupil's inability to work independently, the pupil's need for adult support, or the pupil's need for special education or related services shall not preclude the individualized education program team from determining that the pupil can receive a free appropriate education in an independent study placement. (Education Code 51745(c))

A temporarily disabled pupil may not receive individual instruction pursuant to Education Code Section 48206.3 through independent study; the student should be at Home and Hospital. Education Code 51745(d)

## **Independent Study (Continued)**

**BP 6158 (b)**

No course required for high school graduation under Section 51225.3 shall be offered exclusively through independent study. Education Code 51745 (e)

### **General Independent Study Requirements**

For the 2022-23 school year and thereafter, the Superintendent or designee may continue to offer and approve independent study for an individual pupil upon determining that the pupil is prepared to meet the district's requirements for independent study and is likely to succeed in independent study as well as or better than the pupil would in the regular classroom setting.

Because excessive leniency in the duration of independent study assignments may result in a pupil falling behind peers and increase the risk of dropping out of school, for all grades and programs in independent study, the maximum length of time which may elapse between the time the assignments are made and the date by which the pupil must complete the assigned work is one week for short-term independent study and no more than two weeks for long-term independent study. However, when necessary based on the specific circumstances of the pupil's approved program, the Superintendent or designee may allow for a longer period of time between the date an assignment is made and when it is due, up to the termination date of the agreement.

An evaluation shall be conducted to determine whether it is in a pupil's best interest to remain in independent study whenever the pupil fails to make satisfactory educational progress and/or misses four assignments. A written record of the findings of any evaluation made pursuant to this policy shall be treated as a mandatory interim pupil record. The record shall be maintained for a period of three years from the date of the evaluation and, if the pupil transfers to another California public school, the record shall be forwarded to that school. Satisfactory educational progress shall be determined based on all of the following indicators: (Education Code 51747)

1. The pupil's achievement and engagement in the independent study program, as indicated by the pupil's performance on applicable pupil-level measures of pupil achievement and engagement specified in Education Code 52060(d)(4)-(5).
2. The completion of assignments, assessments, or other indicators that evidence that the pupil is working on assignments
3. Learning required concepts, as determined by the supervising teacher
4. Progress towards successful completion of the course of study or individual course, as determined by the supervising teacher

## **Independent Study (Continued)**

**BP 6158 (c)**

The Superintendent or designee shall provide appropriate existing services and instructional resources to enable pupils to complete their independent study successfully and shall ensure the same access to all existing services and resources in the school in which the pupil is enrolled as is available to all other pupils in the school. (Education Code 51746). The Superintendent or designee shall ensure that pupils participating in independent study are provided with content aligned to grade level standards that is substantially equivalent to in-person instruction. For high schools, this shall include access to all courses offered by the district for graduation and approved by the University of California or the California State University as creditable under the A–G admissions criteria. (Education Code 51747)

Pupils requesting independent study and their parents/guardians should recognize that independent study at the elementary level realistically must emphasize a commitment on the part of the pupil's parents/guardians. At the secondary level, the major commitment must be made by the pupil, assisted or supported as necessary by parents and others who may assist directly with instruction.

### **Pupils Participating in Independent Study for 15 School Days or More: Opportunities for Live Interaction and/or Synchronous Instruction, Tiered Reengagement, and Transition to In-Person Instruction**

The following three requirements apply to pupils participating in independent study for 15 school days or more in a school year. These requirements do not apply to pupils who participate in an independent study program for fewer than 15 days in a school year and pupils enrolled in a comprehensive school for classroom-based instruction who, under the care of appropriately licensed professionals, participate in independent study due to necessary medical treatments or in-patient treatment for mental health care or substance abuse. The district shall obtain evidence from appropriately licensed professionals of the need for pupils to participate in independent study. pursuant to Education Code 51747 (i).

The Superintendent or designee shall ensure that pupils participating in independent study for 15 school days or more receive the following throughout the school year: (Education Code 51747)

1. For pupils in grades transitional kindergarten, kindergarten, and grades 1 to 3, opportunities for daily synchronous instruction
2. For pupils in grades 4-8, opportunities for both daily live interaction and at least weekly synchronous instruction
3. For pupils in grades 9-12, opportunities for at least weekly synchronous instruction

## **Independent Study (Continued)**

**BP 6158 (d)**

For pupils participating in independent study for 15 school days or more, the Superintendent or designee shall ensure that procedures for tiered reengagement strategies are used for all pupils who are not generating attendance for more than 10% percent of required minimum instructional time over four continuous weeks of the district's approved instructional calendar, are found not participatory in synchronous instructional offerings pursuant to Section 51747.5 for more than 50 percent of the scheduled\_ times of synchronous instruction in a school month as applicable by grade span, or who are in violation of their written agreement. This requirement only applies to pupils participating in an independent study program for 15 school days or more. These tiered reengagement strategies shall include local programs intended to address chronic absenteeism, as applicable, with at least all of the following:

1. Verification of current contact information for each enrolled pupil
2. Notification to parents/guardians of lack of participation within one school day of the recording of a nonattendance day or lack of participation
3. A plan for outreach from the school to determine pupil needs, including connection with health and social services as necessary
4. A clear standard for requiring a pupil-parent-educator conference to review a pupil's written agreement and reconsider the independent study program's impact on the pupil's achievement and well-being, consistent with the adopted policies.

For pupils participating in independent study for 15 school days or more, the Superintendent or designee shall develop a plan to transition pupils whose families wish to return to in-person instruction from independent study expeditiously, and, in no case later, than five instructional days.

### **Pupil-Parent-Educator Conference**

Before signing a written agreement, the parent or guardian of a pupil may request that the district conduct a telephone, videoconference, or in-person pupil-parent-educator conference or other meeting during which the pupil, parent/guardian, and if requested by the pupil, parent or guardian, an education advocate, may ask questions about the educational options, including which curriculum offerings and nonacademic supports will be available to the pupil in independent study before making the decision about enrollment or disenrollment in the various options for learning. (Education Code 51747(h)(2))

A pupil-parent-educator conference shall be held as appropriate including, but not limited to, as a re-engagement strategy and/or if requested by a parent or guardian prior to enrollment or disenrollment from independent study. (Education Code 51745.5, 51747, 51749.5)

**Written Agreement**

The Superintendent or designee shall ensure that a written master agreement exists for each participating pupil as prescribed by law. (Education Code 51747, 51749.5) Independent study agreements shall include, but not limited to, all of the requirements of Education Code section 51747(g).

For a pupil participating in an independent study program that is scheduled for more than 14 school days, each written agreement shall be signed, before the commencement of independent study, by the pupil, the pupil's parent, legal guardian, or caregiver, if the pupil is less than 18 years of age, the certificated employee who has been designated as having responsibility for the general supervision of independent study, and the certificated employee designated as having responsibility for the special education programming of the pupil, as applicable. (Education Code 51747)

Beginning in the 2022-23 school year, for a pupil participating in an independent study program that is scheduled for less than 15 school days, each written agreement shall be signed within 10 school days of the commencement of the first day of the pupil's enrollment in independent study, by the pupil, the pupil's parent, legal guardian, or caregiver, if the pupil is less than 18 years of age, the certificated employee who has been designated as having responsibility for the general supervision of independent study, and the certificated employee designated as having responsibility for the special education programming of the pupil, as applicable. (Education Code 51747)

The agreement shall include general pupil data, including the pupil's name, address, grade level, birth date, school of enrollment, and program placement.

The independent study written agreement for each participating pupil also shall include, but is not limited to, all of the following: (Education Code 51747; 5 CCR 11700, 11702)

1. The manner, time, frequency, and place for submitting the pupil's assignments, reporting the pupil's academic progress, and communicating with a pupil's parent/guardian regarding the pupil's academic progress
2. The objectives and methods of study for the pupil's work and the methods used to evaluate that work
3. The specific resources, including materials and personnel, that will be made available to the pupil. Resources include confirming or providing access to connectivity and devices adequate to participate in the educational program and complete assigned work
4. A statement of the County Board's policies detailing the maximum length of time, by grade level and type of program, allowed between an assignment and its completion, the level of satisfactory educational progress, and the number of missed assignments allowed before an evaluation to determine whether it is in the best interests of the pupil to continue in independent study

## **Independent Study (Continued)**

**BP 6158 (f)**

5. The duration of the independent study agreement, including the beginning and ending dates for the pupil's participation in independent study under the agreement, with a maximum of one 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 pupil upon completion
7. A statement detailing the academic and other supports that will be provided to address the needs of pupils who are not performing at grade level, or need support in other areas, such as English learners, pupils with disabilities with an individualized education program or a Section 504 plan in order to be consistent with their program or plan, pupils in foster care or experiencing homelessness, and pupils requiring mental health supports.
8. A statement that independent study is an optional educational alternative in which no pupil may be required to participate
9. In the case of a suspended or expelled pupil who is referred or assigned to any school, class, or program pursuant to Education Code 48915 or 48917, a statement that instruction may be provided to the pupil through independent study only if the pupil is offered the alternative of classroom instruction

Written agreements may be signed using an electronic signature that complies with state and federal standards, as determined by the California Department of Education (CDE). (Education Code 51747)

The parent/guardian's signature on the agreement shall constitute permission for the pupil to receive instruction through independent study.

## **Records for Audit Purposes**

The Superintendent or designee shall ensure that records are maintained for audit purposes. These records shall include, but not be limited to: (Education Code 51748; 5 CCR 11703)

1. A copy of the County Board policy, administrative regulation, and other procedures related to independent study
2. A listing of the pupils, by grade level, program, and school, who have participated in independent study, along with the units of the curriculum attempted and completed by pupils in grades K-8 and the course credits attempted by and awarded to pupils in grades 9-12 and adult education

## **Independent Study (Continued)**

**BP 6158 (g)**

3. A file of all agreements, with representative samples of each pupil's work products bearing the supervising teacher's notations indicating that the teacher has personally evaluated the work or personally reviewed the evaluations made by another certificated teacher
4. As appropriate to the program in which the pupils are participating, a daily or hourly attendance register that is separate from classroom attendance records, maintained on a current basis as time values of pupil work products judged by a certificated teacher, and reviewed by the supervising teacher if they are two different persons
5. Appropriate documentation of compliance with the teacher-pupil ratios required by Education Code 51745.6 and 51749.5 (Education Code 51745.6 and 51749.5)
6. Appropriate documentation of compliance with the requirements pursuant to Education Code 51747.5 to ensure the coordination, evaluation, and supervision of the independent study of each pupil by a district employee who possesses a valid certification document pursuant to Education Code 44865 or an emergency credential pursuant to Education Code 44300 (Education Code 51747.5)

The district shall document each pupil's participation in live interaction and synchronous instruction pursuant to Education Code 51747 on each school day, as applicable, in whole or in part, for which independent study is provided. A pupil who does not participate in independent study on a school day shall be documented as non participatory for that school day. (Education Code 51747.5)

The Superintendent or designee also shall maintain a written or computer-based record such as a grade book or summary document of pupil engagement, for each class, of all grades, assignments, and assessments for each pupil for independent study assignments. (Education Code 51747.5)

The signed, dated agreement, any supplemental agreement, assignment records, work samples, and attendance records may be maintained on file electronically. (Education Code 51747)