

Michigan's Expanded Online Learning Options

Overview

The Michigan Legislature took action in 2013 to expand student access to digital learning options through [Section 21f of the State School Aid Act](#). As a result, students enrolled in a public local district or public school academy in grades 6-12 are eligible to enroll in up to two online courses during an academic term – or more if parents, students, and school leadership agree that more than two are in the best interest of the child. The legislation created the following policy framework:

- ➔ Provides unprecedented statewide choice for students at two levels, one level to choose online learning as an instructional delivery option and one level to select specific course titles;
- ➔ Establishes mechanisms to govern the growth of online learning;
- ➔ Maintains a key role for schools in determining curriculum and the quality and rigor of the online courses they offer as well as the online courses they allow students to take; and
- ➔ Empowers districts to determine their level of engagement as an online learning provider.

Online Course Definition

Section 21f defines a specific model of online learning in which a course: Is capable of generating a credit or grade, is delivered through the Internet, has students and teachers who are separated by time, location or both, and contains a teacher who holds a valid Michigan teaching certificate [and who] is responsible for determining appropriate instructional methods for each pupil, diagnosing learning needs, assessing pupil learning, prescribing intervention strategies, reporting outcomes, and evaluating the effects of instruction and support strategies.

Under the legislation, only online options that meet all these definitional requirements (and enroll students in grades 6-12) are considered an online course. Section 21f's definition does not prevent a school district from offering non-21f online options. A district may continue to provide other online options so long as the options meet the requirements established in Section 5-O-A (http://mi.gov/documents/5O-VirtualHS-DistLearning_41466_7.pdf) and 5-O-B (http://mi.gov/documents/mde/5-O-B_SeatTimeWaivers_329678_7.pdf) of the Pupil Accounting Manual. The focus of Section 21f is online courses, not blended learning programs that rely on some use of face-to-face interaction.

Student Options

Students may select courses from the online course catalog published by the their local district, or they may select courses from Michigan's Online Course Catalog (<http://micourses.org>) that contains course titles from other local school districts or ISDs and from the *Michigan Virtual School*®.

Statewide Catalog and Online Course Syllabus

The statewide catalog of online courses provides information about each course title in a syllabus format that includes more than a dozen required fields. As a condition of providing an online course, a district is responsible for producing an online course syllabus. Only online courses that meet the requirements for Section 21f need to be added to Michigan's Online Course Catalog. The mechanism for providing a course syllabus is through Michigan's Online Course Catalog (<http://micourses.org>). Through this website, districts are able to add, edit, copy, and delete their course syllabi. There is no need for districts to submit a syllabus for course titles being used by their students that appear in the statewide catalog and are being made available by another entity.

District Responsibilities

Section 21f calls on school districts to support the expansion of online learning by:

- ➔ Creating a link to the statewide catalog (<http://micourses.org>) on the district website;
- ➔ Allowing students from the district to take up to two or more online courses during an academic term;
- ➔ Enrolling students in online course(s) and paying the expenses associated with the online course(s);
- ➔ Including the course(s) on the student schedule and granting academic credit for successful course completions;
- ➔ Counting that credit toward graduation and subject area requirements;
- ➔ Adding the course to the student transcript identifying the online course title as it appears in the syllabus;
- ➔ Providing online students the same rights and access to technology as they provide to all other students; and
- ➔ Requiring parental consent before allowing a student to enroll in a course under Section 21f.

Payment for Online Courses

Under Section 21f, school districts are required to use their foundation allowance or per pupil funds to “pay for expenses associated with the online course or courses” and to cover the “cost of the online course.” Districts are not required to pay toward the cost of an online course an amount that exceeds 8.33% of the state’s minimum foundation allowance or per pupil funds calculated in the State School Aid Act for the current fiscal year. Section 21f also identifies a payment schedule for online courses that reflects an 80% payment based on enrollment in the online course and 20% based on completion as determined by the enrolling district, not the district offering the online course.

Denying Enrollment Requests

According to the legislation, school administrators may deny student enrollment requests in an online course for eight reasons, described below:

- The student already earned credits for the course (so the student would be repeating a course).
- The online course would not generate academic credit for the student's transcript.
- Enrollment in the online course is not consistent with the student's graduation requirements or with the student's career interests.
- The student does not have the prerequisite knowledge or skills for the course.
- The student has failed a previous online course in the same subject.
- The online course is of insufficient quality or rigor. If school personnel determines that the online course the student desires is not of sufficient quality or rigor, they must make a reasonable effort to find an alternative online course that meets the school's requirements for quality and rigor.
- The cost of the online course exceeds an amount of 8.33% of the state's minimum foundation allowance for the current fiscal year. Should a parent choose to pay the cost difference in this case, the student may still be enrolled in the course; and
- The course enrollment request doesn't occur within the same timelines established by the district for enrollment and schedule changes for regular courses. Unless the student is newly enrolled in the district, Section 21f enrollment requests must be made prior to the academic term in which the student would be taking the online course.

Student and Parent Rights

The new legislation designates rights for students and parents and allows students to request enrollment in up to two online courses per academic term from their local district catalog or the statewide catalog. Parents must provide consent as part of the student request process (unless the student is 18 or an emancipated minor). In addition, if a local district denies a request to enroll in an online course, the student and/or parent is able to appeal the denial to the ISD superintendent.

District Decisions

School districts are not required to make their online course offerings available to non-resident students and may limit enrollments to the students they claim for pupil accounting purposes. School districts may partner with public and private organizations to support their efforts in offering online courses to resident and nonresident students, including contracts with third-party providers for content, delivery and support services. Districts offering online courses through the statewide catalog can generate revenue by enrolling non-resident pupils in their online course(s), but the district claiming the student for pupil accounting purposes will not see an increase in the per-pupil funding because the student takes one or more online courses. If a district offers courses as a course provider, the district must provide the *Michigan Virtual University* the number of enrollments in each course the district or intermediate school district offered to pupils pursuant to Section 21f in the immediately preceding school year, and the number of enrollments in which the pupil earned 60% or more of the total course points for each online course.

Implementation

The legislation creates a new path for access to options and moves Michigan's educational decision-makers from considering 'if' they're going to allow online learning to 'when' and 'how' they're going to support online learning options for students. School administrators will have many actions to consider when implementing Section 21f, including:

- ➡ Become knowledgeable on the requirements of the 21f legislation.
- ➡ Establish board approved policies and procedures to effectively manage online course enrollments and examine budget implications to support 21f.
- ➡ Identify one or more district employees or a school-based team to provide leadership on 21f implementation.
- ➡ Develop a communications plan to inform students, educators and parents about 21f and create necessary Web links to local and statewide catalogs.
- ➡ Survey students/parents to determine their interest in online course enrollments and use data as part of the existing school improvement planning process.
- ➡ Determine professional and staff development needs to address educator interest in teaching online courses or using blended instructional strategies.
- ➡ Determine if district will be provider as well as consumer of online courses.
- ➡ Establish/expand and/or formalize local mentoring program to support online learners.
- ➡ Review district's technical infrastructure capacity and consider student BYOD approaches.
- ➡ Examine existing school/community space configurations and student supervision protocols to accommodate student work in online course.

For more information visit https://micourses.org/resources/21f_tool_kit.html