

INSTRUCTION

Independent Study Programs

Independent study is an optional alternative instructional strategy for students 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 students 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. As necessary to meet student needs, independent study may be offered for short- or long-term placements, on a full-time or part-time basis and in conjunction with part- or full-time classroom study.

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.

Student participation in independent study shall be voluntary and no student shall be required to participate.

Independent study for each student shall be under the general supervision of a Venture Academy employee who possesses a valid certification document pursuant to Education Code Section 44865 or an emergency credential pursuant to Education Code Section 44300. Students' independent study shall be coordinated, evaluated, and documented, as prescribed by law and reflected in the accompanying administrative regulation.

The minimum period of time for any independent study option shall be three consecutive school days.

General Independent Study Requirements

The Superintendent or designee may offer and approve independent study for an individual student upon determining that the student is prepared to meet Venture Academy's requirements for participation and is likely to succeed as well as or better than the student would in the regular classroom setting.

Because excessive leniency in the duration of independent study assignments may result in a student falling behind peers and increase the risk of dropping out of school, independent study assignments shall be completed no more than four weeks after assigned for all grade levels and types of programs. When necessary, based on the specific circumstances of the student'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. However, in no event shall the due date of an assignment be extended beyond the termination date specified in the student's written agreement.

An evaluation shall be conducted to determine whether it is in a student's best interest to remain in independent study whenever the student fails to make satisfactory educational progress and/or misses fifteen assignments. Satisfactory educational progress shall be determined based on all of the following indicators:

1. The student's achievement and engagement in the independent study program, as indicated by the student's performance on applicable student-level measures of student achievement and engagement specified in Education Code Section 52060.
2. The completion of assignments, assessments, or other indicators that evidence that the student is working on assignments.
3. Learning of 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.

The Superintendent or designee shall ensure that students participating in independent study are provided with content aligned to grade level standards at a level of quality and intellectual challenge substantially equivalent to in-person instruction. For high schools, this shall include access to all courses offered by Venture Academy for graduation and approved by the University of California (UC) or the California State University (CSU) as creditable under the A-G admissions criteria.

The Superintendent or designee shall ensure that students participating in independent study for 16 school days or more receive the following throughout the school year:

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

The Superintendent or designee shall ensure that procedures for tiered reengagement strategies are used for all students participating in an independent study program for 16 school days or more who are:

1. Not generating attendance for more than 10 percent of required minimum instructional time over four continuous weeks of Venture Academy's approved instructional calendar.

2. Not participating in synchronous instructional offerings pursuant to Education Code Section 51747.5 for more than 50 percent of the scheduled times of synchronous instruction in a school month as applicable by grade span.
3. In violation of their written agreement.

Tiered reengagement strategies procedures used in Venture Academy's independent study programs shall include local programs intended to address chronic absenteeism, as applicable, but not limited to the following:

1. Verification of current contact information for each enrolled student.
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 student needs, including connection with health and social services, as necessary.
4. A clear standard for requiring a student-parent-educator conference to review a student's written agreement and reconsider the independent study program's impact on the student's achievement and well-being.

The Superintendent or designee shall for all students who participate in an independent study program for 16 school days or more, develop a plan to transition students whose families wish to return to in-person instruction from independent study expeditiously, and, in no case later, than five instructional days.

When any student enrolled in classroom-based instruction is participating in independent study due to necessary medical treatment or inpatient treatment for mental health or substance abuse under the care of appropriately licensed professionals, the student shall be exempt from the live interaction and/or synchronous instruction, tiered reengagement strategies, and transition back to in-person instruction requirements specified above. In such cases, evidence from appropriately licensed professionals, of the student's need to participate in independent study, shall be submitted to the Superintendent or designee.

The Superintendent or designee shall ensure that a written master agreement exists for each participating student as prescribed by law.

Upon the request of the parent/guardian of a student, and before signing a written agreement as described below in the section "Master Agreement," Venture Academy shall conduct a telephone, videoconference, or in-person student-parent-educator conference or other meeting during which the student, parent/guardian, and, if requested, their advocate may ask questions about the educational options, including which curriculum offerings and nonacademic supports will be available to the student in independent study.

Master Agreement

A written agreement shall be developed and implemented for each student participating in independent study.

For student participation for 16 school days or more, a signed written agreement shall be obtained before the student begins independent study. For student participation of less than 16 school days, a signed written agreement shall be obtained within 10 school days of the first day of the student's enrollment. For a pupil participating in an independent study program that is scheduled for 15 school days or fewer, each written agreement shall be signed, during the school year in which the independent study program takes place, 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.

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

The independent study agreement for each participating student also shall include, but is not limited to, all of the following:

1. The manner, time, frequency, and place for submitting the student's assignments, reporting the student's academic progress, and communicating with a student's parent/guardian regarding the student's academic progress.
2. The objectives and methods of study for the student's work and the methods used to evaluate that work.
3. The specific resources that will be made available to the student, including materials and personnel, and access to Internet connectivity and devices adequate to participate in the educational program and complete assigned work.
4. A statement of the superintendent policy detailing the maximum length of time allowed between an assignment and its completion, the level of satisfactory educational progress, and the number of missed assignments which will trigger an evaluation of whether the student should be allowed to continue in independent study.
5. The duration of the independent study agreement, including the beginning and ending dates for the student'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 student upon completion.
7. A statement detailing the academic and other supports that will be provided to address the needs of students who are not performing at grade level, or need support in other areas, such as English learners, students with disabilities with an individualized education program or a Section 504 plan in order to be consistent with their program or plan, students in foster care or experiencing homelessness, and students requiring mental health supports.
8. A statement that independent study is an optional educational alternative in which no student may be required to participate.
9. (A) (i) For a student participating in an independent study program that is scheduled for more than 15 school days, each written agreement shall be signed by the student, before the commencement of independent study, the student's parent/legal guardian, or caregiver if the student 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 student, as applicable.
 - (ii) For a pupil participating in an independent study program that is scheduled for 15 schooldays or fewer, each written agreement shall be signed, during the school year in which the independent study program takes place, 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.
 - (iii) For purposes of this section, "caregiver" means a person who has met the requirements of Part 1.5 (commencing with Section 6550) of Division 11 of the Family Code.
- (B) Signed written agreements, supplemental agreements, assignment records, work samples, and attendance records assessing time value of work or evidence that an instructional activity occurred may be maintained as an electronic file.
- (C) For purposes of this section, an electronic file includes a computer or electronic stored image of an original document, including, but not limited to, portable document format (PDF), JPEG, or other digital image file type, that may be sent via fax machine, email, or other electronic means.
- (D) Either an original document or an electronic file of the original document is allowable documentation for auditing purposes.

(E) Written agreements may be signed using an electronic signature that complies with state and federal standards, as determined by the department, that may be a marking that is either computer generated or produced by electronic means and is intended by the signatory to have the same effect as a handwritten signature. The use of an electronic signature shall have the same force and effect as the use of a manual signature if the requirements for digital signatures and their acceptable technology, as provided in Section 16.5 of the Government Code and in Chapter 10 (commencing with Section 22000) of Division 7 of Title 2 of the California Code of Regulations, are satisfied.

(F) Notwithstanding subparagraph (A) under paragraph 9, for the 2021 – 2022 school year only, Venture Academy shall obtain a signed written agreement for an independent study program of any length of time from the student, or the student’s parent or legal guardian if the student 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 all persons who have direct responsibility for providing assistance to the student the certificated employee designated as having responsibility for the special education programming of the student, as applicable, no later than 30 days after the first day of instruction in an independent study program or October 15, whichever date comes later.

The agreement shall state the parent/guardian’s signature confers their permission for the student’s independent study as specified in the agreement.

The curriculum and methods of study specified in the written agreement shall be consistent with the Superintendent’s policies, administrative regulations, and procedures for curriculum and instruction.

Fifteen missed assignments will be allowed before an evaluation is conducted to determine whether it is in the best interests of the student to remain in independent study and whether the student should return to the regular school program.

10. In the case of a suspended or expelled student who is referred or assigned to any school, class, or program pursuant to Education Code sections 48915 or 48917, a statement that instruction may be provided through independent study only if the student is offered the alternative of classroom instruction.
11. Before the commencement of independent study projected to last for 16 school days or more, or within 10 school days of the first day of enrollment for independent study for less than 16 school days, the agreement shall be signed and dated by the student, the student's parent/guardian or caregiver if the student is under 18 years of age, the certificated employee responsible for the general supervision of independent study, and for students with disabilities, the certificated employee designated as having responsibility for the special education programming of the student.

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).

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

Student-Parent-Educator Conferences

A student-parent-educator conference shall be held as appropriate including, but not limited to, as a reengagement strategy and/or, if requested by a parent/guardian, prior to enrollment or disenrollment from independent study.

Records

The Superintendent or designee shall ensure that records are maintained for audit purposes.

These records shall include, but not be limited to:

1. A copy of the superintendent policy, administrative regulation, and other procedures related to independent study.
2. A listing of the students, by grade level, program, and school, who have participated in independent study, along with the units of the curriculum attempted and completed by students in grades K-8 and the course credits attempted by and awarded to students in grades 9-12.
3. A file of all agreements, with representative samples of each student'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 students are participating, a daily or hourly attendance register that is separate from classroom attendance records, maintained on a current basis as time values of student 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-student ratios required by Education Code sections 51745.6 and 51749.5.
6. Appropriate documentation of compliance with the requirements pursuant to Education Code Section 51747.5 to ensure the coordination, evaluation, and supervision of the independent study of each student by a Venture Academy employee who possesses a valid certification document pursuant to Education Code Section 44865 or an emergency credential pursuant to Education Code Section 44300.

Venture Academy shall document each student's participation in live interaction and synchronous instruction pursuant to Education Code Section 51747 on each school day, as applicable, in whole or in part, for which live interaction or synchronous instruction is provided as part of the independent study program. A student who does not participate in scheduled live interaction or synchronous instruction shall be documented as nonparticipatory for that school day.

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

Signed written and supplemental agreements, assignment records, work samples, and attendance records may be maintained as an electronic file in accordance with Education Code sections 51747 and 51749.6. as applicable.