Ohio Aspire SFY 2026 Distance Education Policy
July 1, 2025 - June 30, 2026

The United States Department of Education's Office of Career Technical and Adult Education has authorized states to provide distance education (DE) as a formal option for delivering adult basic and literacy education services. This authorization acknowledges the reality that an increasing number of Aspire students have both the capability and desire to pursue their Aspire studies at a distance.

> *Technology should be leveraged to provide access to more learning resources than are available in classrooms and connections to a wider set of "educators," including teachers, parents, experts, and mentors outside the classroom. It also should be used to enable 24/7 and lifelong learning.*
>
> *States, districts, and others should develop and implement learning resources that exploit the flexibility and power of technology to reach all learners anytime and anywhere.*

U.S Department of Education, 2010

The Ohio Department of Higher Education Aspire Distance Education Policy defines the practices and procedures that govern the delivery of DE in Ohio Aspire Programs. **The state office plans to provide approved DE software/curriculum to Aspire grantees during the 3-year grant cycle beginning on July 1, 2024.**

State Requirements

All grant-funded Ohio Aspire programs are <u>required</u> to offer distance education (synchronous or asynchronous). If a student is participating fully at a distance, then the Aspire program must be providing the pre/progress assessment via virtual proctoring. See Appendix A: *Roles and Responsibilities*. The Distance Education strategy in the Aspire Instructional Grant provides details about each program's distance education services.

Definitions

As defined by the National Reporting System (NRS), *Distance Education* is a formal learning activity where students and teachers are separated by geography or time or both for the *majority* of the instructional period. Distance education can be thought of as anytime, anywhere learning. Distance learning instruction is delivered through a variety of media including but not limited to, audio recording, video, broadcasts, computer software, web-based programs and other online technology. Teachers support distance students through communication via mail, telephone, e-mail, online technologies, and/or software.

Ohio does not allow the completion of paper-based assignments to count toward distance education hours. All DE models, including the Teacher Verification and Learner Mastery Models, need to be created with assignments and tasks so that students can demonstrate the possession of digital literacy skills when completing assignments. Examples may include online submissions, audio and video recordings, and use of a Learning Management System (LMS) to submit assignments. We expect all Aspire programs to adhere to copyright laws when creating and choosing assignments and curricula for DE models.

In Ohio, distance education is delivered via online software programs, through an LMS, and through teleconferencing platforms that allow for virtual classrooms

Most DE students in Ohio will receive both distance and traditional classroom education during the program year. This is called a blended or hybrid approach to instruction. At the end of the fiscal year, based on the number of attendance hours in the DE class and the traditional class, the student will be classified, for federal reporting, as either a traditional student or a DE student if more than 50% of the hours are DE. The priority for programs is not how the students are classified for federal reporting; more importantly, the priority for programs is to provide the DE opportunity for all students in order to increase student access to instruction and successful completion of goals.

Approved Curricula

Approved curricula are available for beginning, intermediate, and advanced level ABE, ASE, and ESOL students.

The Aspire office may approve additional curricula after vetting from the state office. The application is only necessary for non-approved asynchronous models. Programs wishing to recommend additional distance learning curriculum for approval must complete an *Aspire Application for New Distance Education Curriculum Approval* form for all DE models and submit it virtually via Microsoft Forms. Accompanying documentation as required in the form must be submitted to aspiregrants@highered.ohio.gov for full consideration. See Appendix B.

Instructional Methods

Distance students need to complete a local Aspire program orientation prior to being enrolled in Distance Education. Contact hours for distance students, where the student and teacher are separated by time, geography, or both, can be direct instructional time with a teacher or proxy hours.

Instructional hours earned via online, computer instruction that occurs at a site other than in the Aspire classroom (e.g., a student's home, a library, a learning center), will be considered as proxy contact hours.

There are three models used with Ohio DE-approved curricula to report proxy contact hours:

- **Clock Time Model,** which assigns contact hours based on the elapsed time that a student is connected to or engaged in an online or stand-alone software program that tracks time.

- **Learner Mastery Model**, which assigns a pre-determined and fixed number of hours of credit based on the student passing a test on the content of each lesson. Students work with the curriculum and materials and when they feel they have mastered the material, take a test. A high percentage of correct answers (typically 70%-80%) earn the credit hours attached to the material. Students are required to take a mastery test at the completion of each instructional unit. Proxy hours are awarded for each test the student passes with a score of 70%-80%.

- **Teacher Verification Model**, which assigns a pre-determined and fixed number of hours of credit for each assignment/task based on teacher determination of the extent to which a student engaged in, or completed, the assignment. Proxy hours are awarded for activities completed by the participant and verified by the instructor. For example, programs that do not have a clock time model, but rather a point system. Another example includes students completing additional components of an online course that do not follow a clock time model nor have an assessment at the end.

    Examples may include

    a.) **synchronous learning activities** such as broadcast/streaming via live video, including, but not limited to Zoom, WebEx, Google Meet, Teams. Programs can choose an option is approved by the fiscal agent.
    b.) **asynchronous learning activities** include Moodle and other self-directed, Aspire-created courses; recorded student instruction and classroom activities delivered through a learning management system or platform such as Google Classroom, Canvas, Moodle, Canva, or Illuminate

Standard follow-up with students, even if virtual, should not be counted as distance education hours as this is not a formal learning activity. If you decided to host a live virtual class for an hour where an instructor offered advising, career pathways information, etc., then an activity like this could be classified as Distance Education.

Assessment

The Ohio Aspire Assessment Policy applies to all Aspire students, including Distance Education students. Progress testing must occur according to test publisher guidelines as indicated in the Ohio Aspire Assessment Policy. **If a student is participating fully at a distance, then the Aspire program must be providing the pre/progress assessment via virtual proctoring.**

Data Management/Reporting

Distance Education hours need to be differentiated in the LACES database. When adding attendance hours, LACES allows you to choose the hour type. When recording DE hours, choose Instruction-Distance Learning. For additional information regarding the step-by-step process, refer to the LACES manual.

DE students will be counted in programs' Annual Performance Reports (APRs) as part of the unduplicated count of all enrolled students.

The state office plans to provide select DE software/curriculum to Aspire grantees during the 3-year grant cycle beginning on July 1, 2024.

All questions related to implementing Distance Education can be directed to
aspiregrants@highered.ohio.gov

Appendices

A*:*   Local Program's Roles and Responsibilities

B: Application for New Distance Education Curriculum Approval

Appendix A: Local Program's Roles and Responsibilities

The Aspire program will offer distance education to its students

Required Trainings

DE Basics and additional module(s) based on job roles, which include:

- DE Basics for Program Administrators
- DE Basics for Program Teachers
- DE Basics for Support Staff

Program Responsibilities

1. Provide Aspire orientation to students that includes:
   - Providing students with a specific and detailed orientation to distance instruction;
   - Determining the student's computer skills and suitability for distance instruction
     Note: The State Aspire Program has no explicit criteria to deny a student who is interested in being a distance education student from participating, but local programs are expected to explain the expectations of all students in distance education to ensure their maximum benefit;
   - Developing an individual learning plan with the student;
   - Establishing an administrative folder for maintaining test results, RIF/R-RIFs, and other items;
   - Assisting the student with obtaining a free e-mail account if needed; and
   - Providing students with locations of computers that could be used for free (libraries, OhioMeansJobs centers, etc.).
2. Provide distance instruction using one or more of the approved curricula.
3. Collect information and input appropriate data for reporting purposes that include:
   - All data entered by the 10th of each month about the student, including progress, and seat time.
4. Provide supplemental instruction and required assessments, which include:
   - Initial and progress testing the student with an approved standardized test per the Aspire Assessment Policy;
   - Delivering any face-to-face supplemental instruction or synchronous instruction needed by the distance student; and
   - Delivering instructional support and monitoring of student instructional activity.

Appendix B: Application for New Distance Education Curriculum Approval

This form must be completed online at https://forms.cloud.microsoft/g/v8dM68UX42.
Accompanying documentation must be submitted to aspiregrants@highered.ohio.gov

Aspire Program		Date submitted	
Aspire Administrator			
Email		Phone	

New Curriculum for Approval

Publisher:		**Instructional Model** (see Instructional Methods section for definitions)
Curriculum Name:		
Contact Name:		
Telephone:		☐ Clock-time model
Email:		☐ Teacher verification model ☐ Learner mastery model
Website: link or access code demo if available		

Cost

Approximate cost per student		Approximate cost to the program	
Additional information:			

Audience

Educational Functioning Levels		Instructional Content (e.g. speaking, listening, social studies)
ABE levels		
ESOL levels		

Additional Information

Is the curriculum aligned to the Common Core/Ohio Aspire College and Career-Readiness Standards or the English Language Proficiency Standards? Is it aligned to other standards such as career pathways standards or technology standards?

Describe the anticipated impact/effectiveness with adult students. Is the content appropriate for adult learners?

Describe the anticipated ease of use for the student. What devices can be used to access the material?

What reports are available for teachers to monitor attendance and progress? (Please attach a sample)

Is training provided with the curriculum? If yes, who will provide the training?

Learner Mastery or Teacher Verification Models only

For Learner Mastery applications: How do you plan to administer assessment and provide feedback in frequent cycles as the student progresses through each stage of the curriculum? (Learner Mastery). How many proxy hours will be assigned per proof of mastery through assessment? How will the instructor keep track and store proof of time earned?

For Teacher Verification applications: What types of activities are included for the teacher verification model? What amount of proxy hours will be assigned per activity? How will the instructor keep track and store proof of time earned?

What is your rationale as to what assignments are worth what amount of proxy hours? (Teacher Verification)
For both Learner Mastery and Teacher Verification: What online platform will you be using for students to access the course content?
For both Learner Mastery and Teacher Verification: Please attach a sample course syllabus that covers at least 1 month of content and time value awards. Time is to be earned in 15-minute increments. If approved, your program will be expected to share a monthly update with new assignments and time value awards.