

**FAQ for
Section 21f of the State School Aid Act
(MCL 388.1621f)**

Section 21f expands access to digital learning options for students in Michigan. This FAQ document offers basic answers to frequently asked questions.

1. Who is eligible to participate in the new digital learning initiative approved by the Legislature and the Governor in 2013?

Answer: Students enrolled in a public local district or public school academy in any of grades 5 to 12 are eligible to enroll in an online course. However, students enrolled in a school of excellence that is a full-time cyber school are not eligible to enroll in online courses as described in Section 21f of the State School Aid Act. Separate provisions for cyber schools are contained in the revised School Code.

2. How is an online course defined?

Answer: Section 21f defines an online course as a "...course of study that is capable of generating a credit or a grade, that is provided in an interactive internet-connected learning environment, in which pupils are separated from their teachers by time or location or both, and in which a teacher who holds a valid Michigan teaching certificate 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."

3. Under Section 21f, how many online courses may an eligible student enroll in at one time?

Answer: With the consent of the student's parent or legal guardian, a student may enroll in up to two online courses as requested by the pupil during an academic term, semester or trimester. Consent of the parent or legal guardian is not required if the student is at least age 18 or is an emancipated minor.

4. Can a district deny a student request to enroll in an online course?

Answer: Yes. In addition to cost limits described in question #10, there are five approved specific reasons for denial, including: 1) the student has previously gained the credits provided from the completion of the online course; 2) the online course is not capable of generating academic credit; 3) the online course is inconsistent with the remaining graduation requirements or career interests of the student; 4) the student does not possess the prerequisite knowledge and skills to be successful in the online course or has demonstrated failure in previous online coursework in the same subject; and 5) the online course is of insufficient quality or rigor. If a district denies a student enrollment because the online course is of insufficient quality or rigor, the district shall make a reasonable effort to assist the student to find an alternative online course in the same or similar subject that is of acceptable rigor and quality.

5. Is there an appeal process if a district denies a student's request to enroll in an online course?

Answer: Yes, a student and his or her parents may appeal the denial by submitting a letter to the superintendent of the intermediate school district (ISD) in which the student's educating district is located. A response to the appeal must be issued within 5 days after it is received.

6. Can all public schools in Michigan elect to offer an online course under Section 21f?

Answer: Yes

7. What online courses may a student select from when making enrollment decisions?

Answer: Students may select courses from the online course catalog published by the educating district, or they may select courses from the statewide catalog of online courses that contains the courses found in the educating district catalog in addition to courses published by other district course providers statewide, including Michigan Virtual School courses.

8. What responsibilities do districts assume when they decide to offer online courses under Section 21f?

Answer: In addition to determining if the district will accept enrollments from nonresident students in their online courses, a district must: 1) provide the Michigan Virtual University (MVU) with the course syllabus in a form and method prescribed by the Michigan Department of Education for inclusion in a statewide catalog to be managed by MVU; 2) provide on its publically accessible website a link to the course syllabi for all of the online courses offered by the district and a link to the statewide catalog maintained by MVU; 3) offer the online course(s) in an open entry and exit method, or aligned to a semester, trimester, or accelerated academic term.

9. Are districts required to pay the costs of online course enrollments for their students?

Answer: Yes, with limits; see question #10. Section 21f requires districts to use their foundation allowance or per pupil funds calculated in the State School Aid Act to pay for the expenses associated with the online course(s).

10. What is the limit on the costs that districts are required to cover for online course enrollments?

Answer: Districts are not required to pay more than 1/12th of the district's foundation allowance or per pupil payment as calculated in the State School Aid Act for a semester course, or more than 1/18th of the district's foundation allowance or per pupil payment as calculated in the State School Aid Act for a trimester course. For example, using the state's minimum foundation allowance of \$7,076 for the 2013-14 school year, a semester course could not exceed \$589 and a trimester course could not exceed \$393. These numbers are based on the state's minimum foundation and could be higher based on each district's per pupil allocations.

11. What kind of access to technology does a district need to provide students enrolled in online courses?

Answer: A student enrolled in an online course must be provided the same rights and access to technology in his or her educating district's school facilities as all other pupils enrolled in the district. The educating district is the district that counted the pupil in membership during the Fall or Spring of the current school year.

12. When will the statewide catalog of online course syllabi be available?

Answer: The Michigan Virtual University expects the statewide catalog to be available to schools, students and the general public beginning in October 2013. Students and their parents will be able to review online course syllabi in the statewide catalog during the fall so that enrollment requests in online courses can be made for the second semester beginning in January 2014.

13. Can enrollments in online courses generate an increase in a district's full-time equivalent count for students?

Answer: No, under Section 21f, the enrollment of a student in one or more online courses cannot result in a pupil being counted as more than 1.0 full-time equivalent (FTE) pupil.

14. Are districts required to grant credit for successful online course completions?

Answer: Yes, districts must grant appropriate academic credit for successful online course completions and must count that credit toward completion of graduation and subject area requirements. In addition, a student's record and transcript must identify the online course title as it appears in the online course syllabus.

15. Will each online course title that appears in a district catalog or in the statewide catalog be required to have a course syllabus?

Answer: Yes, each syllabus will be required to list the following items: 1) the state academic standards addressed in the online course; 2) the online course content outline; 3) the online course required assessments; 4) the online course prerequisites; 5) expectations for actual instructor contact time with the online learning pupil and other pupil-to-instructor communications; 6) academic support available to the online learning pupil; 7) the online course learning outcomes and objectives; 8) the name of the institution or organization providing the online content; 9) the name of the institution or organization providing the online instructor; 10) the course titles assigned by the district and the course titles and course codes from the National Center for the Education Statistics (NCES) School Codes for the Exchange of Data (SCED); 11) the number of eligible nonresident pupils that will be accepted by the district in the online course; 12) the results of the online course quality review using the guidelines and model review process published by the Michigan Virtual University; 13) price of the online course; 14) and enrollment periods for the course, including drop policies and the timeline for random draw selections if demand for a course exceeds capacity.

16. What happens if the enrollment demand for an online course(s) in the statewide catalog exceeds the district's capacity to provide the online course(s)?

Answer: If the number of nonresident applicants exceeds the district's capacity to provide the online course(s), the district must use a random draw system, subject to the need to abide by state and national antidiscrimination laws and court orders. An open enrollment period will be identified for each online course syllabus that appears in the statewide catalog. This information will help districts make a determination in a timely fashion to accept/process enrollments or utilize a random draw system if demand for a particular course exceeds capacity.

17. When offering online courses, are districts required to provide enrollment opportunities for nonresident students?

Answer: No, districts may limit or refuse enrollments to nonresident students.

18. When will the Michigan Virtual University publish online course quality review guidelines and a model review process?

Answer: The Michigan Virtual University has published a document titled Draft Guidelines and Model Review Process for Online Courses that was made available for public comment during the month of August 2013. This material will be finalized in September 2013. To access the latest version of the Guidelines visit: www.mivu.org.

19. For the 2013-14 school year, will the Michigan Department of Education continue to issue seat time waivers for students enrolled in more than two online courses in a given academic term?

Answer: Yes

20. Will the statewide catalog of online courses include performance data?

Answer: Yes, beginning with the 2014-15 school year, the catalog will include: 1) the number of pupils enrolled in each online course in the previous school year; 2) the number of pupils who successfully completed each online course in the previous school year; 3) and the completion rate for each online course.

21. Can districts partner with other public and private organizations to support their efforts in offering online courses to resident and nonresident students?

Answer: Yes, districts can use locally developed online learning solutions and/or contract with third party providers for content, delivery and support services.

22. Will the Michigan Department of Education or Michigan Virtual University approve or reject online courses before they are included in the statewide catalog?

Answer: No, neither the Michigan Department of Education nor the Michigan Virtual University has the authority in legislation to approve or reject courses included in the statewide catalog.

23. Once a student selects an online course and the district approves it, will the statewide catalog offer enrollment and registration services?

Answer: No, but the statewide catalog will provide a link to the site that explains and/or manages the enrollment and registration process.

24. Can students enroll in more than two online courses in a given academic term during the 2013-14 school year?

Answer: Section 21f limits students to two online courses per academic term, semester, or trimester. For a student to enroll in more than two courses, the school has the option of applying for a seat time waiver from the Department, see section 5-O-B of the Pupil Accounting Manual; or if the student is taking the online courses on-site with a certified teacher present, there is no limit on the number of online courses in which the student can enroll up to 1.0 FTE, see section 5-O-A of the Pupil Accounting Manual.

25. Nonpublic students can currently take non-core courses (band, music, art, etc.) at their local public school in a face-to-face setting, and the district is able to claim a portion of the FTE count for each pupil. Can this arrangement continue for non-core courses in an online setting under Section 21f?

Answer: Yes

26. Are students in grades K-4 eligible to enroll in online courses given the restrictions placed on grade eligibility in Section 21f?

Answer: Students in grades K-4 may be given the option by their district to enroll in online courses. See section 5-O-A of the Pupil Accounting Manual.

27. Section 21f(8) requires districts to use its 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.” What is the difference between online course cost and associated expenses?

Answer: The cost of an online course is tied to the direct expenses associated with developing it or paying for it through enrollment/tuition fees, including required course materials such as learning kits or textbooks. Other types of associated expenses include indirect costs such as facilities, computers, network connections and local mentor support services.

28. Is a district allowed to deny a student enrollment in an online course if the cost of the online course exceeds 1/12th or 1/18th of their foundation allowance?

Answer: Yes, the district may deny a student enrollment request in an online course if the cost of the online course exceeds 1/12th or 1/18th of the district’s foundation allowance.

29. If the cost of an online course exceeds 1/12th or 1/18th of a district's foundation allowance or per pupil funding, can the district pass the additional cost of the course on to the student's family?

Answer: No

30. Section 21f identifies the maximum amount districts are required to pay for the enrollment/completion of online courses available in the statewide catalog. The maximum required payment is based on each district's foundation allowance or per pupil funding, which varies by district. Can a district establish more than one fee structure for an online course it makes available in the statewide catalog in an effort to capture higher payments based on higher per pupil funding levels of other districts?

Answer: No, districts will be required to identify a single price for each course title they elect to publish in the statewide catalog.

31. Will the Michigan Department of Education or MVU make a recommendation to schools on how to determine completion?

Answer: No, districts will be able to establish course completion criteria for each online course that appears in the statewide catalog. It is expected that the criteria will not be substantially different from the course completion standards used by districts for traditional face-to-face courses.

32. Given that student schedules have already been made for the 2013-14 school year, at what point are enrollments impacted by the 80/20 rule?

Answer: The 80/20 payment rules will apply to online course enrollments that begin with the second semester of the 2013-14 school year for online courses that appear in the statewide catalog. The statewide catalog will be available to schools, students, and the general public beginning in October 2013. Students and their parents will be able to review online course syllabi in the statewide catalog during the fall so that enrollment requests in online courses can be processed prior to the start of the second semester of the 2013-2014 school year.

33. Can a district that is offering courses in the statewide catalog collect 100% of the cost of the online course as part of the registration process and reimburse enrolling schools the 20% amount for enrollments that did not meet the completion standards?

Answer: Yes, it is permissible for districts offering online courses that appear in the statewide catalog to collect the full tuition amount as part of the enrollment process and reimburse the student's non-resident district the 20% amount associated with any non-completions.

34. Will the 80/20 rule only be applied to students that attend a Michigan public school and not students that attend a nonpublic school?

Answer: The 80/20 payment process only applies to public schools that enroll their students in online courses that appear in the statewide catalog. It is possible that a non-public school student could enroll in a non-core course from their local district that is offered online from the statewide catalog options. In this situation, the non-public student is considered a partial FTE for the district.

35. Given that our district does not operate under a traditional six hour schedule (block), can we establish a payment ceiling for online courses that is different than the 1/12th or 1/18th payment rule outlined in Section 21 of the State School Aid Act?

Answer: No

36. Under Section 21f, are school districts required to honor student/parent requests to enroll in online courses beyond a full student course load?

Answer: No, under Section 21f, the enrollment of a student in one or more online courses cannot result in a pupil counting for more than 1.0 full-time equivalent (FTE) pupil. Districts are not obligated to provide a student with a course load that exceeds a full-time schedule.

37 Under Section 21f, are school districts required to honor student/parent requests to enroll in core and elective online courses when the enrollment does not cause the student’s membership to exceed 1.0 FTE?

Answer: Yes, if the enrollment will not cause the student to exceed 1.0 FTE, and does not meet any of the reasons for denial of enrollment identified in the legislation, then the request for enrollment is allowed. When considering the type of courses that may be requested under Section 21f, the legislation does not make a distinction between core and elective courses. However, a student enrolled through a shared time program would be limited to nonessential electives only.

38 If student takes an online course from another school district (identified in the statewide catalog) how should his/her local district record this on a student transcript? Do they have to accept the letter grade?

Answer: When it comes to determining the letter grade included on the transcript, districts should abide by their district policies or guidelines or create new ones to address this issue. Some districts may treat Section 21f courses the same way they do with recording credits for a new transfer student. Under Section 21f, a district is required to “grant appropriate academic credit and shall count that credit toward completion of graduation and subject area requirements” as well as “identify the online course title as it appears in the online course syllabus.”

39 Do districts have to submit a syllabus for their teacher-less online courses or for their blended learning courses to be in compliance with the Section 21f legislation?

Answer: No, only online courses that meet the requirements of an online course as defined in Section 21f need to be added to Michigan's Online Course Catalog (<http://micourses.org>). If a course does not meet those requirements, then the course syllabus should not be entered into the website. If an online course meets Section 21f requirements, then it should be entered into Michigan's Online Course Catalog, even if the course is only being offered within the district.

The focus of Section 21f is online courses, not blended learning programs that rely on some use of face-to-face interaction. Districts can continue to promote and utilize blended learning options and there is no need to prepare and submit a syllabus for these types of offerings. In addition to having an online teacher who holds a “valid Michigan teaching certificate,” a simple way to determine if the course meets the eligibility requirements of an online course (as defined in Section 21f) is to ask if non-resident students could fully participate in the course with no need for in-person activities.

40 Will districts be able to identify course titles in the statewide catalog that can be included in their local catalog as a strategy to recommend certain courses to student and parents?

Answer: Yes, MVU is developing expanded functionality in the micourses.org website to allow school districts to select individual course titles that appear in the statewide catalog and have them show up in their local district catalog. Districts may want to use this feature to let students and parents know which offerings in the statewide catalog are recognized by the district as high quality or preferred based on previous experience. This feature will be ready for use prior to January 1, 2014.

41 Can a district continue to offer online course options that are not directly taught by a Michigan certificated teacher?

Answer: Yes, if the course is allowable under one of the options outlined in section 5-O-A of the Pupil Accounting Manual.

42 Can districts leverage course reviews conducted by other organizations provided that those reviews included evaluations against the iNACOL quality standards?

Answer: Yes. When a district adds a course syllabus to Michigan’s Online Course Catalog, districts are vouching for the quality of the online course. If a district chooses to forego conducting their own review and instead accepts a review conducted by another organization, that is their choice. If a district decides to use the results of a review conducted by another organization, the district should confirm that the process used to conduct the review is in line with the guidelines and model review process for Michigan available at: (http://media.mivu.org/institute/pdf/guidelines_model_2013.pdf). If the review was conducted by an out-of-state organization, the districts should confirm that the content portions of the review used the applicable Michigan curricular standards. If the organization did not, the district should re-review those portions of the standards. Please note that MVU modified the scoring system using the same iNACOL standards. Instead of the five-point scale (0, 1, 2, 3, 4) iNACOL originally suggested, the review process for the online courses in Michigan will use a three-point scale. Reviewers will be asked to rate a standard as “Not Met,” “Partially Met,” or “Fully Met.” This new rating system simplifies categories both for the reviewers and the consumers of the reviews.

43 If parents find a course in Michigan’s Online Course Catalog that they want their child to take, can they enroll their child in the online course?

Answer: No, the enrollment process is coordinated by the student’s resident or primary educating district.

44 Can districts establish enrollment windows to process enrollment requests in online courses under Section 21f?

Answer: Yes, a district can institute reasonable rules and processes regarding appropriate timeframes for requesting an online course. Districts are expected to apply the same registration deadlines for Section 21f options as they would for their traditional course offerings.

45 Are districts required to provide supervision for online students?

Answer: Districts are responsible for determining a method for monitoring students enrolled in online courses under Section 21f. Some districts may already have established a policy if they previously offered courses in a self-scheduled format as allowed by pupil accounting rule 340.11. If a district is new to self-scheduled learning, the district should seek appropriate advice on what arrangement would best serve the educational interests of their students.

46 What are districts required to tell parents about Section 21f?

Answer: Districts must receive parental consent before allowing a student to enroll in a course under Section 21f, which would require that the district and parents be involved in the decision to enroll the student in courses under Section 21f. The legislation (subsection 7(a)) also requires districts to “provide on its publicly accessible website a link to the course syllabi for all of the online courses offered by the district and a link to the statewide catalog of online courses maintained by the Michigan virtual university.” Beyond these requirements, the legislation does not specifically address parental notification.

Section 22f of the State School Aid Act provides incentive payments to districts that meet best practices. One of the best practices relates to offering online courses or blended learning opportunities to all eligible pupils. In order to satisfy this requirement, “a district must make all eligible pupils and their parents or guardians aware of these opportunities and must publish an online course syllabus as described in Section 21f for each online course that the district offers.”

- 47 If a district offers online learning options that fall outside of Section 21f requirements, can the district cite these options as a reason to deny student/parent requests to enroll in online course titles found in the Michigan online course catalog?**

Answer: No, offering online learning options outside of Section 21f is not listed as a reason districts can use to deny a student from enrolling in an online course in the statewide catalog.

- 48 If prior to January 1, 2014, a district does not put an online course syllabus into Michigan's Online Course Catalog (<http://micourses.org>) that contains a course review, is it prevented from putting in course syllabi thereafter?**

Answer: No. A district can add online course syllabi to the catalog at any time. After January 1, 2014, if a district offers online courses that meet the requirements of Section 21f, at least one of the syllabi needs to contain the results of the course review. After August 1, 2014, all online course syllabi will require the results of the course review.

- 49 Is a district required to provide students with Section 21f options during the summer?**

Answer: No, districts are only required to enroll students in courses under Section 21f during the regular school year. The regular school year may, however, extend into what is traditionally considered the summer break if the school operates on a year-round or extended school calendar.

- 50 If a district wants to share an online course only with districts in its region, does the course still have to be placed in the statewide course catalog?**

Answer: Yes, Section 21f, subsection 4, allows for a district to determine whether it will or will not accept enrollment from non-resident pupils. In such cases where enrollment demand exceeds enrollment capacity, subsection 4 allows for a district to deny enrollments, but only through the use of a random draw system.

- 51 Are the required information fields for a district level syllabus identical to the fields required for a syllabus that appears in the statewide catalog?**

Answer: Yes, one set of required syllabus information applies to all course titles submitted to a local district catalog or to the statewide catalog. However, districts are not required to identify offering information in their local catalog such as data on price, enrollment capacity, completion expectations, scheduling timelines and refund policies.

- 52 Do school boards have to approve the district's online course offerings that appear in their local course catalog or titles they submit to the statewide catalog?**

Answer: The district that is functioning as the online course provider under Section 21f is required to have board approval for the online courses they offer. The district that has students enrolling in an online course under Section 21f would not require board approval (unless the enrolling district and district providing the online course are the same). However, it is a district responsibility to evaluate the rigor and quality of the courses in which their students enroll.

- 53 A local district is allowed to reject a request for an online course if it does not match the rigor required by that district. Does that mean, for example, a district can direct parents and their child to a locally developed online course, instead of the one offered in the state catalog by another district?**

Answer: Districts may suggest but not mandate which courses students select from the titles that appear in a local district catalog or the statewide catalog. It's the district's responsibility to ensure whatever course is chosen is of sufficient quality and rigor.

- 54 May intermediate school districts submit online course syllabi to the statewide catalog?**

Answer: Yes.

- 55 Which district's foundation allowance is used when determining the price ceiling for payment of an online course under Section 21f?**

Answer: The district that claims the student for pupil accounting purposes is required to use the foundation allowance or per pupil payment, as calculated under Section 20 of the State School Aid Act, to determine the allowable payment ceiling for an online course. A district is not required to pay toward the cost of an online course an amount that exceeds 1/12 of the district's foundation allowance or per pupil payment as calculated under Section 20 per semester or an amount that exceeds 1/18 of the district's foundation allowance or per pupil payment as calculated under Section 20 per trimester.

- 56 Can a student be denied enrollment in an online course identified in the statewide catalog if the same course is available locally in a face-to-face or online format?**

Answer: No, the legislation does not provide that scenario as a valid reason for denial of a request for enrollment under Section 21f.

- 57 If a school district's academic terms do not align to the academic term of a Section 21f course (for example: trimester format at the school and student wants to enroll in a semester-based online course) can the district deny enrollment in the course?**

Answer: No, the legislation does not provide that scenario as a valid reason for denial of a request for enrollment under Section 21f.

- 58 Are payment limits for online courses that appear in the statewide catalog based on the academic term of the local school or the length of the online course?**

Answer: The enrolling district is required to pay up to 1/12th or 1/18th of the calculated per pupil payment or district foundation allowance, which means that the limits are based on the enrolling district's semester or trimester schedule rather than the length of the online course. The enrolling district may elect to support additional costs as necessary.

- 59 Are school districts required to price their semester and trimester online courses that appear in the Michigan online course catalog at an amount equal to 1/12th or 1/18th of their foundation allowance?**

Answer: No, districts have discretion to establish a price for online courses as long as the amount does not exceed the ceilings identified in Section 21f for semester and trimester-length courses.