

Hamilton-Fulton-Montgomery BOCES Distance Learning Project

Reference Manual 2014-2015 School Year

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I. OVERVIEW OF DISTANCE LEARNING PROJECT

Introduction

The HFM BOCES Distance Learning Project is a collaborative effort among schools in the region. The distance learning network is a two-way, fully interactive, full-motion video and audio system connecting specially designed classrooms in participating school districts. The network uses fiber-optic cable and telecommunications technology to enable a teacher and students in a distance learning classroom in one school to see, hear, and talk to students in comparably equipped classrooms in other schools on the network. The simultaneously interactive environment means that the teacher and all students remain in visual and verbal communication at all times during a class.

Purpose

The principal goal of the Distance Learning Project is to expand educational and career training opportunities in Hamilton, Fulton, and Montgomery Counties.

Philosophy

The HFM BOCES Distance Learning Network is designed to supplement existing curriculum and instructional staff. Project participants are committed to providing students, staff, and community members with a maximum number of quality educational opportunities within the local district.

Project Participants

Seven (7) sites are connected to the project. They are:

Broadalbin-Perth	Mayfield
Fort Plain	Oppenheim-Ephratah-St. Johnsville
Gloversville	Wells
HFM BOCES Career & Technical Center	

Other districts in the region may also join the network in later years. The project participants are also connected to 46 other sites in the Capital Region, Franklin-Essex-Hamilton, Questar III, and Washington-Saratoga-Warren-Hamilton-Essex BOCES regions. Connections to distance learning projects in other regions have been implemented as well.

The Distance Learning Classroom

The classroom in which the teacher is located is the host site. The classrooms to which a host site transmits are called the remote or receive sites.

The standard distance learning classroom is equipped with two-way, fully interactive audio/video equipment. The equipment consists of:

- a. An overhead-mounted document camera to display visual material and serve as an "electronic chalkboard."
- b. A camera focused on the teacher. In most rooms, this camera is in the front of the room.
- c. A camera in the front of the room focused on the students.

- d. One (1) or two (2) ceiling microphones, a surface-mounted microphone at the teacher station, and a lavalier wireless microphone for the teacher. In a handful of rooms, surface-mounted microphones at each student table are utilized instead of ceiling microphones.
- e. Two displays (most often one projection system and one LCD flat panel display) in the front of the room for student and teacher viewing of each remote site and any material displayed by means of the document camera, computer, and interactive whiteboard panel.
- f. A Blu-ray player for local presentation use.
- g. Teacher station touch screen controls to select the camera to be active and to adjust the cameras (pan, tilt, zoom).
- h. A phone/fax/copy machine to transmit hardcopy between sites (quizzes, homework, instructions, etc.) and to contact students individually through a phone call.
- i. Computers at the student desks (in some classrooms).

Photos of typical distance learning classrooms, showing equipment and layout, can be found on the regional Distance Learning web site at <http://dl.neric.org/>.

Schedule of Classes

A copy of the overall distance learning schedule can be found on the regional Distance Learning web site at <http://dl.neric.org/>.

II. STUDENT GUIDELINES

A. Course Registration

1. Guidance counselors in the respective school districts schedule students for courses on the distance learning network.
2. Guidance counselors generate a list of student enrollment and submit the list to the host school's guidance counselors.

B. Student Orientation

All students scheduled for distance learning courses:

1. Are provided with an opportunity to visit the distance learning classroom before the course begins.
2. Receive a copy of the distance learning student reference manual.
3. Must sign, along with their parents, a student agreement form before starting a distance learning class.

C. Student Evaluation

1. Distance learning students are evaluated in accordance with the approved course description. The host-site teacher will inform students of the evaluation methods and processes at the beginning of each course.
2. The final examination schedule is coordinated through and disseminated by the building principals.

D. Student Grading

1. All grades are the responsibility of the host-site teacher. The teacher ensures that grade reports are transmitted to the remote-site schools by courier or by fax on the dates stated in the host school's calendar.
2. Host site teachers submit interim (5-week) reports to the remote sites on their dates stated in the host school's calendar, using the official form of the sending school.

E. Student Record Keeping

1. Student records for distance learning courses are kept by the host site teachers. This includes grades, attendance, and any other information deemed necessary.
2. Supervising staff members at the remote sites take daily attendance in their individual distance learning classrooms and report all absences to the appropriate authority, in accordance with school attendance procedures.

3. The host site teacher sends all cumulative records to each distance learning student's respective school at the conclusion of the course.

F. Student Attendance

1. The host-site district attendance policy will be followed in any distance learning course.
2. For courses offered directly by a college for college credit, that college's attendance policy will be followed.

G. Student Add / Drop of Course

1. It is understood that the adding of a course will be governed by the student's home district policies and procedures. The host site teacher will be consulted prior to any change. In the event of a dispute, however, the host site will ultimately determine whether the student may enter the class.
2. The dropping of a course will be governed by the student's home district policies and procedures. The host site teacher will be consulted prior to any change.
3. For courses offered directly by a college for college credit, the add/drop policies of the college will be used.

H. Student Conduct

The success of the distance learning program requires the cooperation and support of students. The expectations outlined in the student agreement form must be understood and agreed to by students and parents alike.

In particular, students are expected to follow all school rules, including those specifically developed for the distance learning program. In cases where rules are not followed, students are subject to local procedures administered by the teachers, site administrator(s), and/or others as designated.

I. Student Discipline

1. The teacher conducting a distance learning class is expected to maintain an appropriate learning environment.
2. The receiving district shall assume full responsibility and liability for the supervision and maintenance of discipline of students in the receiving school.

J. Class Cancellations and Interruptions

1. Classes will only be canceled for factors at the host sites, such as equipment failure or snow days.
2. Cancellations at remote sites are treated as days missed and the students are responsible for making up the work.

3. Scheduled interruptions, such as fire drills or field trips, that take students out of distance learning classes should be held to a minimum. Whenever possible, remote sites should be notified in advance of such events.

III. OPERATING GUIDELINES FOR STAFF

Please note - Staff should refer to any collective bargaining agreement or board of education policies in their district pertaining to distance learning.

A. Classroom Responsibilities

The responsibilities of teachers participating in the distance learning program are essentially the same as those of any teacher in the respective school districts.

Distance learning instruction does entail, however, several unique responsibilities. Teachers in the distance learning program will:

1. Cooperate with supervising staff members at the receiving sites to promote effective instruction.
2. Develop course descriptions to be shared with students at the beginning of the school year or semester.
3. Use classroom equipment, such as cameras, switching devices, and fax machine.
4. Send materials to remote sites.
5. Develop emergency lesson plans to be used by substitutes.
6. Follow those guidelines as described in the student manual, section II (C-I).

B. Staff Training

1. Any staff member teaching an approved course on the distance learning system is required to complete a training workshop.
2. During training, the teacher will learn how to operate the distance learning classroom equipment (e.g. cameras, touch panel control system), learn some basic instructional design techniques, and prepare and deliver a short lesson using equipment to transmit to at least one other site.
3. Supervising staff members at remote sites are also required to complete a similar training session.

C. Textbooks and Materials Selection

Textbooks and related materials for distance learning courses are determined by the transmitting districts, purchased by that district, and distributed to remote sites.

D. Courier System

A key component of the distance learning program is reliable and efficient distribution of materials between network sites. Below are various options program participants can use to move materials from one site to another:

1. Each distance learning classroom has a fax/copy machine to transport tests, quizzes, and other paperwork between sites.
2. Teachers and students are encouraged to use the document camera to transport information between sites (for example, a student at a remote site could place his/her homework on the document camera for the host-site teacher to see).
3. The BOCES courier system can be used to distribute materials. Items should be sent to the appropriate teacher or teacher aide for the class and be clearly marked for the distance learning program.
4. Sites may want to establish another mechanism for distributing materials on an individual basis.

E. Teacher Absence / Substitute Teaching

1. A teacher absent from his/her distance learning class follows the established procedures in his/her district related to substitute coverage. In addition, the teacher is responsible for informing the appropriate person that he/she is a host teacher of a distance learning class.
2. Each distance learning instructor is responsible for developing emergency plans for substitute teachers, including such things as videos, work sheets, etc.
3. Host schools will attempt to supply substitute teachers trained in distance learning procedures when a host teacher is absent.

F. Extra Help for Students

Extra help for students will be worked out between the instructor and the student(s) requesting help. If the distance learning network is used for extra help sessions, instructors must contact the remote site(s) to ensure supervision will be present.

G. Field Trips

Field trips for distance learning classes are arranged by agreement of the host and remote site(s), through the respective building principals.

IV. COMMITTEE STRUCTURE

The following committee structure has been established to develop the distance learning program and address distance learning issues brought to its attention. The committees are as follows:

Executive Team:

- Has broad supervisory authority for policy matters related to the Distance Learning Project
- Membership consists of:
 - The superintendents from each distance learning district
 - A BOCES representative
 - The distance learning coordinator

Program Steering Committee:

- Develops the distance learning course schedule, which includes full-year, half-year, and mini-courses, college courses, after school workshops, and other programming that could be offered via the network.
- Membership consists of 1-2 representatives from each school, including superintendents, principals, guidance counselors, teachers, or other district staff.



DISTANCE LEARNING PROGRAM STUDENT AGREEMENT FORM

The Distance Learning Program represents an opportunity for students to take advantage of the latest technology and instructional techniques and to receive courses that might not normally be offered in this school. The program can only function with the cooperation of the students. Students enrolled in distance learning courses and their parents will enter into an agreement whereby the students will conduct themselves in such a manner as to ensure the optimum utilization of the program.

Please carefully read the information below and sign in the space provided to indicate your understanding of the rules and your agreement to abide by them.

As a student taking a course on the Distance Learning Network, I understand that:

- A. Appropriate behavior is expected at all times. Insubordination (defined as anything that interferes with teaching or learning in the classroom) of any kind will not be tolerated.
- B. I will follow all school rules as outlined by my school's code of conduct, and those established by the host-site teachers, including those rules specifically developed for the Distance Learning Network. In particular:
 - Inappropriate language or gestures will not be tolerated.
 - I will treat school property with respect and I will be held responsible for intentional damage or destruction that I do to any property in the distance learning classroom.
- C. I will handle distance learning classroom equipment only if authorized to do so.
- D. I will sit within camera view at all times unless instructed by the teacher to do otherwise.
- E. I understand that, at times, classroom activities will be videotaped.
- F. Any electronic devices (including cell phones) must be turned off to avoid interference with the classroom audio system, unless otherwise authorized by my host-site teacher or local school district policies.
- G. I will only attend conflicting local school assemblies when I am directly involved in presenting the assembly program. In addition, my distance learning class takes precedent over conflicting extracurricular / co-curricular activities. I further understand that, if I must miss a class, advance notice to my teacher is my responsibility.

In cases where rules are not followed, students will be subject to a range of penalties from verbal warning to exclusion from the course.

I, _____, understand the significance of the Distance Learning Program environment.
Student's Name

I further understand the rules listed above and agree to adhere to them. I am making a commitment to complete the course for which I have registered.

Course Name(s) School year

Signature of Student Date

Signature of Parent(s) Date