

Capital Region / FEH BOCES / Questar III Distance Learning Project

Reference Manual 2017-2018 School Year

<http://dl.neric.org>

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1. INTRODUCTION

Project Goal - The principal goal of the Distance Learning Project is to expand educational and vocational training opportunities in the Capital Region BOCES, Franklin-Essex-Hamilton BOCES, and Questar III regions.

Project Description - 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.

Project Participants and Schedule of Classes – 31 districts are currently participating in the project. They are:

Averill Park	Maple Hill HS (Schodack)
Beekmantown (<i>Expanded DL only</i>)	Middleburgh
Berlin	Moriah
Berne-Knox-Westerlo	Rensselaer
Burnt Hills – Ballston Lake	Saranac Lake (<i>Expanded DL only</i>)
Brushton-Moira	Schalmont
Cairo-Durham	Schoharie
Catskill	Scotia-Glenville
Chatham (<i>Expanded DL only</i>)	Sharon Springs
Cobleskill-Richmondville	St. Regis Falls
Cohoes	Taconic Hills
Columbia HS (East Greenbush)	Troy
Coxsackie-Athens	Tupper Lake
Duanesburg	Voorheesville (<i>Expanded DL only</i>)
Hoosic Valley	Watervliet (<i>Expanded DL only</i>)
Malone (Franklin Academy)	

29 additional schools in the Hamilton-Fulton-Montgomery and Washington-Saratoga-Warren-Hamilton-Essex BOCES Networks are also directly connected to the system. The distance learning course schedule of classes can be found on the regional Distance Learning web site at <http://dl.neric.org/>.

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.

Each distance learning classroom is equipped with two-way, fully interactive audio/video equipment. Most distance learning classrooms utilize the following equipment:

- 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).

A diagram of the typical distance learning classroom, showing equipment and layout, is provided in the appendix of this manual.

2. OPERATING GUIDELINES

As a starting point, member school districts in the Distance Learning Project will work together in good faith within the parameters of the following general guidelines:

- a. The teaching of classes on the Distance Learning System shall be made with a commitment for a full school year determined on or before June 1 of the previous school year.
- b. An Advisory Committee has been established to act in the capacity of a liaison between the schools, and to deal with problems that may arise. The Advisory Committee is made up of representatives of each school. In the event the Committee votes on an issue, each district gets one vote.
- c. The intent of the Distance Learning Project is to improve/expand learning opportunities. Therefore, there will be no reduction of staff in the department of the school where a course is being sent or received, directly related to the Distance Learning System.
- d. Every effort will be made to accommodate visitors.
- e. The optimum class size for distance learning is in the range of 18 to 20 students. The maximum number of total students at all participating sites allowed to enroll in a distance learning class (the "enrollment cap") is established by the district hosting the class. Students participating at the host school get priority to enroll in a distance learning class over students enrolling in a receiving school. Teachers must be appropriately consulted about adding any students after the course begins.
- f. Teacher training will be provided before and as needed, during the semester or school year. Such training will be considered for in-service credit in accordance with provisions of the local school.
- g. Supervision must be provided at each Distance Learning site.
- h. Technical support is available for each Distance Learning site.
- i. Any agreement in regard to the above area will be effective during the period of July 1, 2017 through June 30, 2018.

Any understanding dealing strictly with the Distance Learning Project does not change or replace any agreement or practice currently enforced in the local districts.

3. TEACHER 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:

- a. Develop course outline/requirements to be shared with students at the beginning of the school year or semester.
- b. Use prescribed equipment.
- c. Send grades to remote sites.
- d. Develop three (3) emergency lesson plans to be used by substitutes.

Overall discipline will be the responsibility of the host-site teacher. Persistent or serious problems will be the responsibility of host-site administrators or their designees.

4. STAFF DEVELOPMENT

Any staff member teaching an approved course on the distance learning system is required to complete a formal training workshop.

During training, the teacher will learn how to operate the distance learning system and its component parts (e.g. cameras, touch panel control system) and prepare and deliver a short lesson using equipment to transmit to at least one other site.

- a. Teacher training will be conducted during the summer months or at convenient times during the school year. The training may qualify for in-service credit.
- b. Additional staff, such as substitute teachers, teacher aides/assistants, room monitors, and media specialists, may be trained at the discretion of the participating school districts.
- c. Teachers will be compensated for participation in the training sessions.

Any staff member serving as a room supervisor is also required to complete a formal training workshop.

5. STUDENT POLICY

5.1 Course Registration

- a. Guidance counselors in the respective school districts schedule students for courses on the distance learning network.
- b. Guidance counselors generate a list of student names and submit the list to the host schools' guidance counselors by August 31st for classes beginning in the Fall semester and full-year courses.
- c. Students registering for a distance learning course understand that classroom activities will be video recorded. These class recordings may be shared securely with other members of the class for educational purposes. It is further understood that enrollment in the distance learning class serves as student and parental permission to be recorded within the classroom, as noted in the Student Agreement Form in the appendix of this manual.

5.2 Student Orientation

All students scheduled for distance learning courses:

- a. Are provided with an opportunity to visit the distance learning classroom before the course begins.
- b. Receive a copy of the distance learning student handbook.
- c. Must sign, along with their parent(s)/guardian(s), and return the student agreement form before starting a distance learning class.

5.3 Student Evaluation

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

5.4 Student Grading

- a. All grades are the responsibility of the host-site teacher. The teacher keeps grades in numerical form. The teacher ensures that grade reports are sent to the remote-site schools in a timely fashion. The host school calendar will guide the timeline for submitting grade reports.
- b. Host site teachers submit interim reports to the remote sites.

5.5 Student Record Keeping

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

5.6 Student Discipline

- a. The teacher conducting a distance learning class is expected to maintain an appropriate learning environment.
- b. Inappropriate student behavior at the remote sites is handled by the site administrator (or designee). The supervising staff member at the remote site is responsible for communicating any discipline problem to the appropriate administrator.

5.7 Student Discipline Policy

The success of the distance learning program requires the cooperation and support of students. The following expectations must be understood and agreed upon by students and parents alike. Students are expected to:

- a. Follow all school rules, including those specifically developed for the distance learning program.
- b. Handle distance learning classroom equipment only if authorized to do so.
- c. Sit within camera view at all times, unless instructed by the teacher to do otherwise.

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.

6. COURSE SCHEDULE

The current distance learning course schedule can be found on the regional Distance Learning web site at <http://dl.neric.org/>.

7. CALENDAR

- a. The calendar of the host district is used for each course being offered.
- b. The schedule includes the dates for end of marking periods and the due dates for interim reports and grades.
- c. Calendars for participating sites will be shared among all sites in the course cluster.

8. CLASS CANCELLATIONS AND INTERRUPTIONS

- a. Classes are canceled only for factors at the host sites, such as equipment failure or snow days.
- b. Cancellations at remote sites are treated as days missed and the students are responsible for making up the work.
- c. Scheduled interruptions, such as fire drills or field trips that take students out of distance learning classes, are held to a minimum. Whenever possible, remote sites are notified in advance of such events.

9. TEXTBOOKS AND MATERIALS

Textbooks and materials for a distance learning course are selected by the host teacher, purchased by the host school, distributed to remote sites, and returned each year by the remote sites to the host site. Each site is responsible for lost or damaged textbooks or materials issued to that site.

10. SUBSTITUTE TEACHERS

- a. A teacher absent from his/her distance learning class follows the established procedures related to substitute coverage.
- b. Each distance learning teacher is responsible for developing three (3) emergency lesson plans for substitute teachers.
- c. Host schools will attempt to supply substitute teachers trained in distance learning when a host teacher is absent.

11. FIELD TRIPS

Field trips for distance learning classes are arranged by agreement of the host and remote sites, through the respective building principals. The host teacher is responsible for obtaining the field trip forms from each participating site.

12. MATERIALS DISTRIBUTION

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

- a. Districts are encouraged to use online tools such as e-mail, learning management systems (Blackboard, Schoology), or other online learning platforms (Google Classroom, Edmodo) to exchange information between students, teachers, and sites.
- b. 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).
- c. Some distance learning classrooms have a fax/copy/scan machine to transport tests, quizzes, and other paperwork between sites.
- d. Regular mail service can also be used.
- e. Sites may want to establish another mechanism for distributing materials on an individual basis.

13. VISITATIONS

To maintain an optimum educational atmosphere in the distance learning environment, the following policy must be adhered to:

- a. Each visit must receive prior approval of the distance learning instructor(s) affected by the visit, whether at the teacher's own host site or at a remote site.
- b. Each building visitor must report to the designated administrator's office upon arrival to the building and prior to the distance learning visitation.

14. SCHEDULING PROCESS

- a. Member sites will work together in good faith throughout the scheduling process to maximize the number of course opportunities available to students through the Distance Learning Program.
- b. The first draft of the regional Distance Learning course schedule will be developed in January of the prior school year. Revisions to the draft schedule will be made throughout the Spring of the prior school year.
- c. Member sites are free to sign up for multiple Distance Learning classes within the same timeslot throughout the scheduling process. However, member sites cannot create a new course "cluster conflict" by signing up for a fully subscribed course any time after the end of the March Advisory Committee meeting. A cluster conflict occurs when there is an over-subscription in the number of receive sites signing-up for a particular class.
- d. The criteria for resolving course cluster conflicts are listed below in the order they will be applied:
 1. Remote sites receiving the initial class in a multiple-class sequence get priority for the second and subsequent classes in that sequence over remote sites not participating in the initial class. For example, if a remote site participates in Mandarin Chinese I, that remote site gets priority to receive Mandarin Chinese II the following year over sites not participating in Mandarin Chinese I.
 2. Each requesting remote site will receive at least one (1) section of the over-subscribed course before one of these requesting sites can receive a second section of that course.

3. If a cluster conflict remains after other steps to resolve the cluster conflict have been exhausted (including use of the criteria above), the names of each of the remote sites signed-up to receive that particular class will be placed in a hat. Remote sites whose name is drawn out of a hat get priority to receive a particular class over remote sites not selected. This process will be replicated for each remaining cluster conflict and will be independent of any previous drawings in that year.
 4. If a remote site is not randomly selected to receive a particular over-subscribed course per the process outlined in #3 above for two (2) consecutive years, that remote site will get priority to receive that same course the following year over other remote sites. The Distance Learning Support Team will be responsible for documenting and tracking the results of the random drawings.
- e. All cluster conflicts will be resolved no later than the end of the April Advisory Committee meeting.
 - f. New distance learning courses can be proposed by host-site districts at any point throughout the year. However, for scheduling in the following school year, any courses proposed after the March Advisory Committee meeting can only be received by districts that are not already previously scheduled to receive another distance learning class.

15. COMMITTEE STRUCTURE

Steering Committee

- Has ultimate decision making authority and responsibility for distance learning project
- Membership consists of:
 - The superintendents from each distance learning district
 - BOCES representatives

Advisory Committee

- The project's working group
- Main responsibility is developing distance learning program (school year schedule, summer school, college courses, etc.)
- Makes recommendations to Steering Committee about distance learning policy
- Membership consists of:
 - Representation from each school (Superintendents, Principals, Guidance counselors, Teachers)
- Recommendations and decisions made through consensus - if committee reaches impasse on an issue, Steering Committee makes ultimate ruling
- Districts can send more than one person to this committee's meetings, however, if ever a vote is necessary, each school gets one vote

Teachers Committee

- Responsible for discussing distance learning teacher issues
- Membership consists of:
 - Instructors teaching on the system
 - Interested instructors
- Makes recommendations to the Advisory Committee about distance learning policy