1. **Definition**

Distance learning is formal learning activity where students and instructors are separated by geography, time or both for the majority of the instructional period. Distance learning materials come in a variety of media including but not limited to: print, audio recording, videotape, broadcasts, computer software, web-based programs and other online technology. Teachers support distance learners through the following methods including but not limited to: communication via mail, telephone, e-mail, online technologies and software, or face to face instruction.

1. **Distinction between a Distance learning Participant and a Participant with Proxy Hours**

For a student to be counted as a distance learning participant in a program year, the preponderant amount of instruction must be delivered through distance learning. A distance learning participant is a student who has more proxy hours than direct hours. NRS Table IVC reports distance learning participants.

1. **Requirement for Direct Contact Hours**

Students in distance learning must have at least 12 hours of direct contact with the program before they can be counted for federal reporting purposes. Direct contact hours involve interaction between the learner and program staff. This can be a combination of direct face-to-face contact as well as contact through telephone, video, teleconference or online communication, in which the identity of the learner can be verified. Live online discussions, telephone conference calls, monitored labs and live video broadcasts to remote locations are examples of direct contact hours that are countable under this definition.

1. **Proxy Contact Hours**

In addition to direct contact hours, programs may also report proxy hours to track time students spend on distance learning activities. Proxy hours differ from direct contact hours in that the identity of the learner and/or the exact amount of time spent on a learning activity cannot always be verified directly.

A **participant with proxy hours** is a student who engages in distance learning and has completed at least one proxy hour. A participant with proxy hours will not be counted as a distance learning participant unless the total number of proxy hours exceeds the total number of direct hours.

1. **Distance learning Curriculum Models**

In order to determine a learner’s proxy hours a program must use an approved distance learning curriculum and one of the following models:

* *Clock Time Model:*Assigns proxy hours based on the time that a learner is connected to or engaged in an online or stand-alone software program that tracks time.
* *Teacher Certification Model:* Assigns a fixed number of proxy hours for each activity in a distance curriculum based on teacher verification of the extent to which a learner engaged in or completed the assignment.
* *Learner Mastery Model*: Assigns a fixed number of proxy hours based on learner mastery of each lesson in the distance curriculum as demonstrated by passing a test with a high percentage (usually 70% to 80%) of correct answers.
1. **Curriculum Approval Process**

Each curriculum employed for distance learning delivery must be approved by the state office before using and before proxy hours can be reported. The [Approved List Distance Learning Curricula for Texas Adult Education](http://www-tcall.tamu.edu/twcael/initiatives/distcurriculum.html) with associated models used for calculating proxy hours is posted on the Texas Center for the Advancement of Literacy and Learning's (TCALL) website at http://www-tcall.tamu.edu/ twcael/initiatives/distcurriculum.html.

Each new curriculum for which proxy hours potentially are to be calculated must be reviewed and approved by the AEL State Office with input from a statewide distance learning advisory committee. The advisory committee, appointed by the AEL State Office, shall be chaired by an AEL State Office staff and consist of no fewer than three instructors, two program administrators, and one professional development expert who have extensive experience implementing distance learning curricula with adult education students.

The approval of a new curriculum for distance learning purposes begins with a request from a program manager who has completed a pilot of the curriculum. The program director initiates the request by emailing adulteducation@twc.state.tx.us with the request. The AEL Staff Office in turn sends the local program director the request form, which is submitted back upon completion to adulteducation@twc.state.tx.us.

1. **Assessment**

All students engaged in distance learning courses will be post-tested after the same amount of instructional time as other students, according to the approved state assessment policy. Both direct contact hours and proxy contact hours are counted to calculate the amount of instructional time. Students must appear in person at a proctored program site for baseline tests and any subsequent posttests. Assessments must be conducted through face-to-face interaction with a trained test administrator in a secure setting using only state and NRS approved assessments.

1. **Distance Learning Models**

In order to determine a learner’s proxy hours a program must use an approved distance learning curriculum and one of the following models:

* 1. Clock Time Model: Assigns proxy hours based on the time that a learner is connected to or engaged in an online or stand-alone software program that tracks time.
	2. Teacher Certification Model: Assigns a fixed number of proxy hours for each activity in a distance curriculum based on teacher verification of the extent to which a learner engaged in or completed the assignment.
	3. Learner Mastery Model: Assigns a fixed number of proxy hours based on learner mastery of each lesson in the distance curriculum as demonstrated by passing a test with a high percentage (usually 70% to 80%) of correct answers.

Proxy hours calculated through the Clock Time Model must utilize curricula that electronically track time the student spends interacting with instructional material and disconnects after a preset period of inactivity. Publishers must assure that a maximum of 15 minutes of inactivity occurs before disconnection.

Teacher Certification and Learner Mastery Models must justify program recommendations for assigning proxy hours based on student pilot(s) of the curriculum. Both models involve a pilot of the curriculum by at least 1 teacher with a minimum of 10 students who, on average, use the curriculum at least 10 hours. For both models, an activity must be completed by at least 5 students in order to be considered for proxy hour calculation. During the pilot, students may work on the curriculum either during class or outside of class. A student log or computerized print-out must track how long students work on each assignment. After students complete the curriculum, the teacher will collect the student logs and submit them to the DL Advisory Committee for proxy hour determination.

* Teacher Certification: Proxy hours are awarded based on the teacher’s certification of student’s completion of assignments. Teachers may award full proxy hour credit if the assignment is completed and demonstrates competence in the teacher’s professional judgment. Teachers may award half of the full proxy hour credit if the assignment is only partially completed but still demonstrates competence. Assignments which do not demonstrate competence must be resubmitted by the students in order to be counted for proxy hour time.
* Learner Mastery: Proxy hours are awarded based on a passing score on a test over a particular assignment, lesson, or unit. The passing rate will be set at a minimum of 70% unless otherwise recommended during the curriculum approval process.
1. **Registration and Assignment**

All of the required NRS data elements will be recorded in TEAMS for distance learning participants and participants with proxy hours. For data to be reported on NRS Table IV or Table IVC, 12 or more direct hours and a baseline assessment are required.

When creating a distance learning class in TEAMS, it will be necessary to identify the curriculum and the model used for calculating proxy hours. Once identified as a distance learning class in TEAMS, students can be assigned and both direct hours and proxy hours can be recorded.

* 1. Proxy hours in the Clock Time Model are tracked electronically.
	2. Proxy hours in the Teacher Certification Model are awarded for various activities completed by the participant and verified by the instructor. These proxy hours are pre-determined for each activity.
	3. Proxy hours in the Learner Mastery Model are awarded when the students passes a test demonstrating mastery of the course content. These proxy hours are pre-determined.

If the Teacher Certification or Learner Mastery Model is chosen, any direct contact hours of instruction from the same curriculum may not be counted since total proxy hours have already been assigned. However, any direct contact hours for registration, orientation, assessment, or instruction that are not part of the distance curriculum may still be counted.

1. **Reporting Hours**

Programs will report all instructional hours into the state data base (TEAMS). Classes that have been identified as distance learning classes in TEAMS will permit programs to record proxy hours and direct hours separately.

1. **Distance Learning Program Plan**

All programs offering distance learning classes will have a current Distance Learning Local Provider Plan on file at the state office. The plan is written during participation in required distance learning training for programs new to distance learning. Program administration will review the plan annually and submit all revisions to the state office. This plan must be submitted to the AEL State Office and approved before the program may enter student proxy hours in TEAMS.

1. **Required and Other Training**

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| If the Program Managing Director is: |
| ***New*** to Distance Learning in AEL Programs | Complete Training Required |
| ***Not New*** (has documented experience with Distance Learning in an AEL Program) | No Training Required if director has experience with AEL distance learning before July 1, 2015. However, may need to serve as a team lead for staff enrolled in the course. |

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| If the Teacher/Coordinator/Instructional Aide/etc. to be assigned to Distance Learning is |
| ***New***to Distance Learning in AEL Programs | Complete Training Required |
| ***Not New*** (has documented experience with Distance Learning in an AEL Program) | No Training Required if staff has experience with AEL distance learning before July 1, 2015. |

Training consists of two sections. The first is an introductory course that explains the distance learning policy in Texas and how distance learning is tracked, documented, and entered into TEAMS. The second section covers best practices in the development and implementation of a distance learning program for AEL students. By the end of the Distance Learning Training, programs will have completed a draft of their Distance Learning Local Provider Plan.