

Independent Study (IS) Attendance, and Tiered Re-Engagement Strategies

Under the mandates of AB 130, a student who is participating in Independent Study (IS) must be documented and include records of participation in live interaction and synchronous instruction, assignments, assessments and grades. AB 130 also requires school districts and county offices of education to implement tiered re-engagement strategies for IS students who are not generating attendance for more than three school days or 60 percent of the instructional days in a school week, or who are in violation of the students' required written agreement. These strategies may include, but are not limited to:

- Verification of current contact information for each enrolled student;
- Notification to parents or guardians of lack of participation within *one school day* of the student's absence or lack of participation;
- A plan for outreach from the school to determine the student's needs, including connection with health and social services as necessary;
- Confirm or provide access to connectivity and devices to participate and complete assignments; and
- Conference between the parent, student and teacher to review the IS written agreement, and possible reconsideration of student's participation in the IS program and impact on the student's educational achievement and well-being.

Documentation of live interaction and synchronous instruction is required for *each school day*. If a pupil does not participate in independent study on a school day, it shall be documented as non-participatory for that school day, per Education Code (EC) 51747.5.

Live interaction is defined as the interaction between the student and LEA classified or certificated staff, and may include peers, provided for the purpose of maintaining school connectedness, including, but not limited to, wellness checks, progress monitoring, provision of services and instruction. This interaction may take place in person or in the form of internet or telephonic communication.

Synchronous instruction is defined as classroom-style instruction, or designated small-group or one-on-one instruction delivered in person or in the form of internet or telephonic communications, involving *live two-way communication* between the teacher and pupil.

These provisions allow the school staff to connect with students every day and readily identify when a student begins to show behaviors toward disengagement within the IS environment. Students who do not comply with the live interaction activities and/or synchronous instruction opportunities will trigger the need for daily follow up by local staff. If the disengagement continues then this will trigger the tiered re-engagement strategies.

Absences and chronic absenteeism

Attendance and chronic absenteeism remain relevant for the 2021-2022 school year, even for students in IS. As stated in EC 51747.5, *if a pupil does not participate in independent study on a school day, it shall be documented as non-participatory for that school day.* Students who miss as little as two days per month are missing 10% of the 20 school days offered on average and are considered Chronically Absent. Per EC 60901, Chronic Absenteeism may be a result of excused absences, unexcused absences, and missed school due to disciplinary consequences, such as suspension or expulsion. LEAs are actively seeking means to address discipline with Other Means of Correction as described in EC 48900.5. Over the long term, chronic absenteeism is correlated to lower reading levels as of grade three assessments, increased rates of high school dropouts, adverse health outcomes and poverty in adulthood, and an increased likelihood of involvement with the criminal justice system. The early grades (TK-2) lay the foundation for a positive school experience and continued enrollment throughout the students' school career. The importance of attendance carries over for all ages and into all instructional settings, including IS.

Who may be able to support these efforts?

Tier 1 re-engagement: *The universal approach provided when the student is initially missing from the IS environment.*

Strategies: Similar to the distance learning re-engagement process, a small cadre of staff could support the premise of school connectedness for those on IS. This could entail outreach from the classroom aide, a clerk or another school official assigned to make the initial check-in call. These assigned staff could call students or parents to perform a wellness check, find out why a student is not turning in assignments and/or not showing up on the assigned synchronous instruction day or just to connect to see how the student and their family are doing overall. This could be accomplished by:

- Verify current contact information
- Address access and connectivity issues
- Create pathways for parents to maintain ongoing communication
- Daily/regular notice to parent regarding absences from the IS environment
- Outreach plan to determine students' needs, including: technology, academic support, physical or mental health concerns, social services, etc.
- Clear communication with parents about academic progress
- Building relationships with calls on a regular basis to learn more about the student's motivations and future plans to help guide the classwork and behaviors in that direction.

Tier 2 re-engagement: *The teacher, clerk, aide or others cannot reach the student or the student continues to be non-participatory.*

Strategies: Students may need to be connected to school and local community resources depending upon the specific needs of the family and student. Referrals could include contacts with the district attendance staff, nurse, school psychologist, counselor, school social worker, special education point person, the homeless or foster liaison, or support for a technology issue. Support could also be sought for tutoring, mental health, medical health, substance abuse

providers, Department of Children and Family Services and more. Resources needed will be determined by the unique needs of the participating student. It is also a time to remind the parent and student that there is an IS agreement in place, and the next step would be to evaluate if the IS plan remains beneficial for the student's academic success. This could be accomplished by:

- Address access and connectivity issues
- Phone call, text and/or email to parents and/or student – documentation of all efforts
- Ask other students to reach out on social media
- Mail letter to last known address
- Home visit through attendance staff, SRO, etc.
- Connect with needed resources- counseling, medical, tutoring, etc.
- Positive contact from teacher
- Match with a mentor

Documentation of tiered intervention contacts should be kept in the student's cumulative folder or in the school information system, if possible, and a copy provided to the IS instructor.

Tier 3 re-engagement: *Intensive intervention efforts are required. The student is non-participatory despite the offering of needed support and intervention.*

Strategies: The IS contract, limited success for the student, and the appropriateness of the IS placement would be evaluated at a conference with the student, parent and teacher. In person instruction may be more appropriate for the student. The local school attendance review team and/or school attendance review board processes may also be initiated if the student continues to be non-responsive to re-engagement efforts.

If an IS student has a Section 504 plan or an active IEP, an amendment meeting may need to be held to ensure due process and review of current placement.

Please note that the requirements for live interaction, synchronous instruction and tiered reengagement are only required for students who are contracted to be on IS for 15 days or more.

How can a district document these interactions?

Proper tracking of the initial contact and subsequent follow up is essential to ensure students and parents are informed of expectations, concerns are addressed, and the student is re-connected to the educational environment.

Reflection on previous documentation methods utilized during distance learning may be helpful. Modification of previous engagement log practices may be valuable and provide valuable data. The California Department of Education (CDE) is currently working on a tiered re-engagement template that will soon be released. LACOE has created a modified version of the previous daily par report in an effort to support tracking of live interactions and synchronous opportunities for audit purposes. [Optional Independent Study Daily Participation Record](#). In addition, please click here for a [Sample Tiered Reengagement Checklist Spreadsheet](#) that could be used to track tiered re-engagement strategies by student by date and referrals for additional supports [Sample District Student Support Request](#). We anticipate that SIS providers are working

diligently to develop similar formats compatible with your SIS system to make this as easy as possible for LEA staff.

Communications with parent and student

Districts should align communications about student academic progress and IS expectations with communications related to re-engagement of students. Consideration should include the following when creating local policy for the manner and frequency of the communication with students and parents:

- Provided in both Home Language and English
- Progress along the continuum of language development for the student
- Access to content
- Integrated strategies to improve attendance and motivation
- Information for parents to understand the live interaction and synchronous instruction schedules and learning environment.
- Social-emotional effects as a result of independent study and possible isolating effects.

Please note that meetings, whether in-person or virtual, require that the LEA provide the needed interpreter for the entire session. If notes are provided, the parents may request the notes be translated into their primary language.

Reflections on communication from the field

- Parents and students need information provided to them in their home language with clear, concise, short and consistent messaging. The use of picture icons for contacts may prove valuable to families.
- Connect with students and parents in a manner convenient for them. Some students and families' may have preferences for text, calls or online platforms.
- Consistency with the expected schedules and school contacts will be beneficial to establish routines not only with attendance but also in communications.