

Attendance Frequently Asked Questions for 2020-21 School Year

Updated October 6, 2020

(Amended definition of “Instruction during Quarantine” and responses to Q18 and Q19)

Purpose

In anticipation of the possibility of continued challenges of COVID-19 for the 2020-2021 school year, the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education holds three policy priorities for the education of students in Missouri. First, we must protect the health and safety of students, educators, and the public. Second, we must ensure that students continue to receive the best possible education, no matter the circumstance. Third, to the greatest extent possible, schools must be paid for educating students in a variety of scenarios.

DESE has provided guidance as to the approved patterns of instruction for claiming state aid. Review [Administrative Memo QS-20-007](#) and the [attendance guidance document](#) linked within the memo.

Definitions

- **Distanced Instruction:** Students are offsite and receive instruction through online means or through the use of physical materials. Instruction includes teacher interaction as approved by the department in the LEA’s AMI-X plan.
- **Fixed Blended Instruction:** Students receive instruction under a planned pattern of onsite and distanced instruction that includes a minimum equivalent of two (2) full days of onsite instruction per week. For the purpose of this rule, fixed-blended calendars are designed to support social distancing.
- **Virtual Instruction:** Students receive all instruction through technology-based delivery that meets the requirements of Sections 161.670 and/or 162.1250, RSMo.
- **Instruction during Quarantine:** An individual student or a group of students, such as a classroom or bus roster, receive distanced instruction for an identified period of time to protect public health.
- **Intermittent Blended Instruction:** Students in an entire school building or LEA receive distanced instruction during a period of interruption to the planned pattern. The planned pattern of onsite or fixed blended instruction is interrupted by local conditions that prevent any onsite instruction.
- **Onsite Instruction:** Students are physically present at the school under the guidance and direction of teachers in the teaching process.

Planned Patterns of Instruction

Onsite Instruction

- **Definition:** Students are physically present at the school under the guidance and direction of teachers in the teaching process.

Onsite Instruction	
Schedule	4-5 days per week
Minimum onsite time	4-5 days per week per calendar
Instruction	Face-to-face
Attendance Calculation	Actual Onsite: Attendance / (Attendance + Absence)
Approval Needed	Calendar

Example: Traditional 4 or 5 day per week calendar; 1,044 hour minimum. All students expected to be in attendance at school every day.

Virtual Instruction

- Definition: Students receive all instruction through technology-based delivery that meets the requirements of Sections 161.670 and/or 162.1250, RSMo.

Virtual Instruction	
Schedule	N/A
Minimum onsite time	N/A
Instruction	Technology-based delivery in accordance with Sections 161.670 and/or 162.1250, RSMo
Attendance Calculation	94%
Approval Needed	Calendar

Fixed Blended

- Definition: Students receive instruction under a planned pattern of onsite and distanced instruction that includes a minimum equivalent of two (2) full days of onsite instruction per week. For the purpose of this rule, fixed-blended calendars are designed to support social distancing.

Fixed Blended Instruction	
Schedule	Pattern of days alternating onsite and distanced instruction. School buildings are still open. Students are divided into groups so that alternating pattern reduces the number of students present at the school at any given time.
Minimum onsite time	At least two (2) days each week onsite. Student group size reduced. (Not all students present on those two (2) days.)
Instruction	Face-to-face and distanced
Attendance Calculation	Actual onsite rate applied to all days
Approval Needed	AMI-X

Example: Students divided into two groups (A and B).

	Week 1					Week 2				
	Mon.	Tues.	Wed.	Thur.	Fri.	Mon.	Tues.	Wed.	Thur.	Fri.
A	Seat.	Dist.	Seat.	Dist.	Seat.	Dist.	Seat.	Dist.	Seat.	Dist.
B	Dist.	Seat.	Dist.	Seat.	Dist.	Seat.	Dist.	Seat.	Dist.	Seat.

In this example, the actual onsite attendance rate (yellow days) would be applied to all possible attendance hours (yellow + green days).

Below is a sample attendance record for two students (Student A and Student B) who are both in student group A from the example above. “P” represents student present. “A” represents student absent.

	Week 1					Week 2				
	Mon.	Tues.	Wed.	Thur.	Fri.	Mon.	Tues.	Wed.	Thur.	Fri.
Student A	P		P		P		A		P	
Student B	P		A		P		P		A	

Student A’s rate of attendance (80%) would be applied to all 10 days of instruction.

Student B’s rate of attendance (60%) would be applied to all 10 days of instruction.

Q1: Can a school pivot from Onsite Instruction to Fixed Blended Instruction to Virtual Instruction based on local conditions?

A: Yes. If schools have the capability to pivot among patterns of instruction based on local conditions, such as public health statistics, they may do so.

Possible Patterns of Instruction Qualifying for State Aid

Onsite Instruction: Schools have an approved calendar of at least 1,044 hours and students are physically present for instruction. Attendance is claimed at the actual rate. No changes are made from current practice.

Virtual Instruction: Students receive all instruction through electronic or on-line delivery. Courses meet the requirements of Sections 161.670 and/or 162.1250, RSMo. Attendance is claimed at 94% of the same course delivered as Onsite Instruction. Students qualifying for A+ are claimed at 95% in MOCAP courses. There are no changes from current practice.

Fixed Blended Instruction Patterns

For the purpose of reducing the number of students physically present at school at any given time, schools that offer patterns of instruction where students are physically present for some part of each week and learn at a distance during the rest of the week may claim attendance under some circumstances. To claim attendance, students must be physically present at least two days each week. The following patterns satisfy this requirement.

- 4/1 (Four days onsite/one day distanced)
- 3/2 (Three days onsite /two days distanced)
- 2/3 (Two days onsite /three days distanced)
- AM/PM (Morning onsite /Afternoon distanced)
- A/B Alternating Days (Onsite every other day)

Patterns that Do Not Qualify for State Aid

Patterns of instruction that do require students to be physically present at least twice each week do not qualify for state aid under an AMI-X plan. These patterns include the following.

- 1/4 (One day onsite/four days distanced)
- Alternating Weeks (Onsite every other week)

The following grids illustrate the patterns of instruction listed above.

Key: Onsite Distanced

Fixed Blended Instruction

	Week 1					Week 2				
Onsite/Distanced	M	T	W	Th	F	M	T	W	Th	F
4/1	Onsite	Onsite	Onsite	Onsite	Distanced	Onsite	Onsite	Onsite	Onsite	Distanced
3/2	Onsite	Distanced	Onsite	Distanced	Onsite	Onsite	Distanced	Onsite	Distanced	Onsite
2/3	Onsite	Onsite	Distanced	Distanced	Distanced	Onsite	Onsite	Distanced	Distanced	Distanced
A/P	Onsite	Distanced	Onsite	Distanced	Onsite	Onsite	Distanced	Onsite	Distanced	Onsite
A/B	Onsite	Distanced	Onsite	Distanced	Onsite	Distanced	Onsite	Distanced	Onsite	Distanced

Non-reimbursable Patterns of Instruction

	Week 1					Week 2				
Onsite/Distanced	M	T	W	Th	F	M	T	W	Th	F
1/4	Distanced	Distanced	Distanced	Distanced	Onsite	Distanced	Distanced	Distanced	Distanced	Onsite
W/W	Onsite	Onsite	Onsite	Onsite	Onsite	Distanced	Distanced	Distanced	Distanced	Distanced

Waiver

If a school wishes to offer a pattern of instruction not listed above, the school must submit a waiver request to the Commissioner of Education. The waiver must include the pattern of instruction, an explanation of student-teacher interaction, and the rationale for the requested approval.

Expectations for Distanced Learning Days

The use of Fixed Blended Instruction is to be used for the purpose of reducing the number of students present at school at any given time. During the distanced component of the blended plan, the expectation is that students receive quality lessons. The lesson design during Intermittent Blended Instruction must

continue to focus on the quality and frequency of student-teacher interaction to ensure effective delivery of the planned content. DESE Area Supervisors of Instruction will be monitoring the implementation of Distanced Instruction to ensure quality and to identify best practices.

Approval and Use of Plans

Q2: When do I need approval for an alternate plan?

A: Alternate Methods of Instruction need Department approval prior to their implementation if attendance will be claimed. For the 2020-21 school year, DESE will use an enhanced AMI plan referred to as the Alternate Methods of Instruction – Extended (AMI-X) Plan. It differs from an AMI plan because it sustains instruction over a longer period of time by ensuring that the school delivers regularly planned content and that teachers provide both instruction and feedback to students. This plan will be applicable for both “Alternative Methods of Instruction” and interruptions due to COVID-19. Put simply, AMI Plans will be used as provided in statute. AMI-X Plans, as set forth in 5 CSR 20-30-660.085, effective August 1, 2020, will be used for fixed blended models and closures related to COVID-19.

Because a number of LEAs already have approved AMI plans, DESE will facilitate transition to AMI-X Plans in this way:

1. If an LEA has an approved AMI plan that qualifies as an AMI-X Plan, they will be notified.
2. If an LEA has submitted an AMI Plan that does not qualify as an AMI-X Plan, the LEA will be notified and may submit an AMI-X enhancement so that the plan qualifies.
3. Any LEA that has not submitted an AMI plan may do so and may also wish to consider submitting both an AMI application and AMI-X enhancement.

Q3: May I use my AMI-X Plan for inclement weather?

A: No. While the AMI plan can be used up to 36 hours for weather conditions, AMI-X plans are reserved to minimize COVID-19 impact.

Q4: Can the approved AMI plan be used as the AMI-X Plan if it addresses all critical areas included in the AMI-X Plan?

A: Yes. If an LEA has submitted an AMI Plan that does not qualify as an AMI-X Plan, the LEA will be notified by DESE and may submit an AMI-X enhancement so that the plan qualifies.

Q5: May I use my AMI plan for a COVID closure?

A: See question 2 above. While yes, an AMI plan may be used for up to 36 hours of a COVID closure, DESE has created the AMI-X plan specifically for COVID closures, knowing those periods of closure may be longer than 36 hours, therefore requiring greater continuity of instruction.

Closures

Q6: What should a school do during an inclement weather closure?

A: Schools with an approved AMI plan may implement the AMI plan for an inclement weather closure. Schools may claim up to 36 calendar hours and the associated attendance during any one school year using the AMI plan.

Q7: What should a school do if it must close because of a utility outage?

A: Schools with an approved AMI plan may implement the AMI plan for a closure due to a utility outage. Schools may claim up to 36 calendar hours and the associated attendance during any one school year using the AMI plan.

Q8: If a school must close due to COVID-19, what should they do?

A: A school with an approved AMI-X plan should implement that plan during the COVID-19 closure.

Payment and Calculations

Q9: How is attendance calculated for blended settings?

A: For blended settings, attendance is calculated by applying the rate of attendance for the onsite portion of the pattern to all possible attendance hours at the student level.

Q10: How is “present” defined to receive daily attendance for virtual instruction?

A: For purely virtual instruction, as outlined in Sections 161.670 and/or 162.1250, RSMo, attendance is based on course completion and claimed at a rate of 94% of the same course taught in the non-virtual program. The exception is for A+ eligible students taking MOCAP courses, whose attendance is claimed at 95%. Qualifying A+ students completing a non-MOCAP virtual course are reported at a rate of 94%, but the district should have an internal A+ policy and appeal process that could take into consideration special circumstances such as these for A+ qualifications. This policy and process does not change the attendance hours reported to DESE.

Q11: How will attendance be calculated if a student participates in a fixed blended structure and only attends some onsite days but completes all assignments?

A: A student’s attendance in the fixed blended pattern of instruction is based on the attendance during the onsite portion. The rate of attendance for the onsite portion is applied to all possible hours for the term or year for that student.

Q12: How should attendance be calculated for students enrolled in dual credit courses?

A: Dual credit students’ attendance should be recorded as appropriate for their pattern of instruction.

Q13: If our LEA has a low attendance year, what recourse will we have?

A: Districts will continue to be paid based on the highest of the current year estimate, first preceding year, or second preceding year Weighted Average Daily Attendance (WADA) as outlined in Section 163.036, RSMo.

Individual Students

While these planned patterns of instruction provide a basis for program planning that is eligible for state aid, claiming attendance must be defined at the student level.

Q14: Should students be rewarded for perfect attendance?

A: No. rewarding perfect attendance is usually laudable but introduces unjustified risk under current conditions.

Q15: Will there be a special attendance code for students who are absent due to COVID-19?

A: No. Students absent because of COVID-19 should be recorded as with any other absence due to illness unless the provisions of homebound instruction are met and instruction is provided.

Q16: If a student stays home due to illness, does the school need to provide instruction and claim attendance?

A: Routine illness should be handled as it is customarily handled by the school. To the extent that the student’s condition makes it advisable, homework and possibly instruction may be provided. Attendance should be recorded as an absence due to illness.

Q17: What happens when a parent wants to change from an onsite to a virtual instruction program (or the reverse)?

A: Some LEAs have offered individual parents/students a choice for distanced instruction that would otherwise meet the requirements of virtual instruction. Such coursework can be claimed for attendance based on course completion (47% or 94%). If the LEA allows a student to switch from virtual to onsite instruction in substantially similar coursework prior to course completion, the onsite attendance rate can be applied to the entire course. If a student switches from onsite to virtual instruction, attendance will be determined by course completion at the applicable rate (47% or 94%).

Q18: If an individual student is quarantined, but able to engage in the instructional program, are they counted absent?

A: (*Updated 10-6-20*) Yes, unless the student either qualifies and is provided services through homebound instruction, or is provided distanced instruction consistent with the LEA’s AMI-X plan.

Q19: Are there any special attendance procedures needed if a group (classroom, bus load, etc.) of students are quarantined?

A: (*Updated 10-6-20*) While DESE's original guidance indicated a need to notify Area Supervisors of Instruction when a group of students was quarantined, the magnitude and frequency of quarantines has made that impractical. No special procedures are currently needed.

Q20: How does an LEA accommodate new students who are under quarantine due to a military order?

A: LEAs may provide services consistent with their AMI-X plan to students required to quarantine by military order. These students may also be claimed for attendance.

Q21: If a parent keeps a student home must the school provide a distanced learning option?

A: Distanced learning is not required but is encouraged whenever possible. The LEA should handle absences other than necessary quarantines using school and building absence policies and practices.

Other

Q22: Will the frequency of attendance reporting change for the 2020-2021 academic year?

A: DESE is exploring whether more frequent attendance reporting could feasibly be used to support public health purposes.

Additional Questions (added August 7, 2020)

Q23: Can an LEA charge parents for daycare services provided during Distanced Instruction days?

A: If ADA is being claimed, which applies on Distanced Instruction days, charging for daycare during the normal school day is not legal.

Q24: Are districts allowed to provide Distance Instruction to preschool students as part of Fixed Blended Instruction, Intermittent Blended Instruction and/or Instruction during Quarantine learning models? And would this need to be noted in the LEA's AMI-X plan?

A: Yes. Distanced Instruction, utilizing developmentally appropriate physical materials, is allowed for preschool students who are being claimed for state aid, as long as the program has an appropriate board-approved calendar and an approved AMI-X plan. However, preschool students are not eligible for reimbursement under a completely virtual course program, as outlined in Sections 161.670 and/or 162.1250, RSMo, which apply only to Grades K-12.

Q25: If students start the year using the Onsite Instruction model and then switch to Virtual Instruction, do LEAs claim students at 94% upon course completion?

A: No. The planned pattern of Onsite Instruction is the basis for attendance determination. The attendance rate for Onsite Instruction days is applied by individual student to all Distanced Instruction days.

Q26: If an LEA has all students enrolled in a virtual program, are students allowed to come to school to work on the virtual program if such attendance is not required?

A: The decision to move to an all Virtual Instruction delivery method implies that local conditions do not support standard/traditional onsite school attendance. Reasonable exceptions, with strict physical distancing protocols in place, can be made to provide services to students as outlined in their IEP, to provide intervention services to students needing additional supports, to facilitate device and instructional material delivery, and to provide access to external Wi-Fi from parking lots on campus.

Q27: Will attendance be reported as virtual if an LEA starts the school year using the Distanced Instruction model for all students with plans to return onsite as conditions allow, but then completes an entire semester distanced?

A: If an LEA chooses to utilize the Distanced Instruction model for all students to begin the school year, it is assumed to be Intermittent Blended, with the onsite attendance rate to be applied to the entire year. DESE will continue to monitor the length of distanced learning plans and provide additional guidance as needed.