

**FAQ for
Section 21f of the State School Aid Act**

(MCL 388.1621f)

Developed by the Michigan Department of Education
and Michigan Virtual University

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Section 21f expands access to digital learning options for students in Michigan. This FAQ document offers basic answers to frequently asked questions.

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SCHOOL ELIGIBILITY

What entities are eligible to offer online courses through Section 21f?

Michigan LEAs, PSAs, ISDs, community colleges, and the Michigan Virtual University are eligible to offer online courses through Section 21f. *(Updated November 2015)*

STUDENT ELIGIBILITY

Who is eligible to participate in online course offerings provided under Section 21f of the State School Aid Act?

Students enrolled in a public local district or public school academy in any of grades 6 to 12 are eligible to enroll in an online course. This could include students who enroll through a district on a part-time basis, such as those participating in a shared time program, as long as all applicable membership requirements are met. *(Updated November 2015)*

Are students in grades K-5 eligible to enroll in online courses given the restrictions placed on grade eligibility in Section 21f?

Students in grades K-5 may be given the option by their district to enroll in online courses. See section 5-O-A of the Pupil Accounting Manual. *(Updated September 2014)*

Under Section 21f, how many online courses may an eligible student enroll in at one time?

With the consent of the student's parent or legal guardian, a student may enroll in up to two online courses as requested by the pupil during an academic term, semester or trimester. If a pupil has demonstrated previous success with online courses and the school leadership and the pupil's parent or legal guardian determine that it is in the best interest of the pupil, a pupil may be enrolled in more than two online courses in a specific academic term, semester, or trimester. Consent of the parent or legal guardian is not required if the student is at least age 18 or is an emancipated minor. *(Updated September 2014)*

Can students enroll in more than two online courses in a given academic term?

Section 21f limits students to two online courses per academic term, semester, or trimester unless the student has demonstrated previous success with online courses and the school leadership and the student's parent or legal guardian determine that it is in the best interest of the student to allow for enrollment in additional courses per academic term, semester, or trimester. *(Updated November 2015)*

Will the Michigan Department of Education continue to issue seat time waivers to districts for students enrolled in more than two online courses in a given academic term?

Yes. However, students are able to take more than two online courses under Section 21f without needing a seat time waiver if the pupil has demonstrated previous success with online courses and the school leadership and the pupil's parent or legal guardian determine that it is in the best interest of the pupil *(Updated August 2013)*

Under Section 21f, are school districts required to honor student/parent requests to enroll in online courses beyond a full student course load?

No. Under Section 21f, the enrollment of a student in one or more online courses cannot result in a pupil counting for more than 1.0 full-time equivalent (FTE) pupil. Districts are not obligated to provide a student with a course load that exceeds a full-time schedule. *(Updated December 2013)*

Under Section 21f, are school districts required to honor student/parent requests to enroll in core and elective online courses when the enrollment does not cause the student’s membership to exceed 1.0 FTE?

Yes. If the enrollment will not cause the student to exceed 1.0 FTE, and does not meet any of the reasons for denial of enrollment identified in the legislation, then the request for enrollment is allowed. When considering the type of courses that may be requested under Section 21f, the legislation does not make a distinction between core and elective courses. However, a student enrolled through a shared time program would be limited to nonessential electives only. *(Updated December 2013)*

Is a district required to provide students with Section 21f options during the summer?

No. A district is only required to enroll students in courses under Section 21f during its regular school year. The regular school year may, however, extend into what is traditionally considered the summer break if the school operates on a year-round or extended school calendar. *(Updated December 2013)*

When offering online courses, are districts required to provide enrollment opportunities for nonresident students?

No. Districts may limit or refuse enrollments to nonresident students according to district policy. Course providers under Section 21f may also designate whether a course is open to nonresidents. *(Updated November 2015)*

Nonpublic students can currently take non-core courses (band, music, art, etc.) at their local public school in a face-to-face setting, and the district is able to claim a portion of the FTE count for each pupil. Can this arrangement continue for non-core courses in an online setting under Section 21f?

Yes. Section 166b of the State School Aid Act allows nonpublic and homeschool pupils the opportunity to enroll in courses in nonessential elective subject areas. See Section 5-E of the Pupil Accounting Manual. *(Updated November 2015)*

ONLINE COURSE SYLLABI

How is an online course defined?

Section 21f defines an online course as a “...course of study that is capable of generating a credit or a grade, that is provided in an interactive internet-connected learning environment, in which pupils are separated from their teachers by time or location or both, and in which a teacher who holds a valid Michigan teaching certificate is responsible for determining appropriate instructional methods for each pupil, diagnosing learning needs, assessing pupil learning, prescribing intervention strategies, reporting outcomes, and evaluating the effects of instruction and support strategies.” *(Updated August 2013)*

Will each online course title that appears in a district catalog or in the statewide catalog be required to have a course syllabus?

Yes. Each syllabus will be required to list the following items: 1) the state academic standards addressed in the online course; 2) the online course content outline; 3) the online course required assessments; 4) the online course prerequisites; 5) expectations for actual instructor contact time with the online learning pupil and other pupil-to-instructor communications; 6) academic support available to the online learning pupil; 7) the online course learning outcomes and objectives; 8) the name of the institution or organization providing the online content; 9) the name of the institution or organization providing the online instructor; 10) the course titles assigned by the offering entity and the course titles and course codes from the National Center for the Education Statistics (NCES) School Codes for the Exchange of Data (SCED); 11) the number of eligible nonresident pupils that will be accepted by the offering entity in the online course; 12) the results of the online course quality review using the guidelines and model review process published by the Michigan Virtual University; 13) price of the online course; 14) and enrollment

periods for the course, including drop policies and the timeline for random draw selections if demand for a course exceeds capacity. *(Updated August 2013)*

Are the required information fields for a district level syllabus identical to the fields required for a syllabus that appears in the statewide catalog?

Yes. One set of required syllabus information applies to all course titles submitted to a local district catalog or to the statewide catalog. However, districts are not required to identify offering information in their local catalog such as data on price, enrollment capacity, completion expectations, scheduling timelines and refund policies. *(Updated December 2013)*

Do districts have to submit a syllabus for their teacher-less online courses or for their blended learning courses to be in compliance with the Section 21f legislation?

No. Only online courses that meet the requirements of an online course as defined in Section 21f need to be added to Michigan's Online Course Catalog (<http://micourses.org>). If a course does not meet those requirements, then the course syllabus should not be entered into the website. If an online course meets Section 21f requirements, then it should be entered into Michigan's Online Course Catalog, even if the course is only being offered within the district.

The focus of Section 21f is online courses, not blended learning programs that rely on some use of face-to-face interaction. Districts can continue to promote and utilize blended learning options and there is no need to prepare and submit a syllabus for these types of offerings. In addition to having an online teacher who holds a "valid Michigan teaching certificate," a simple way to determine if the course meets the eligibility requirements of an online course (as defined in Section 21f) is to ask if non-resident students could fully participate in the course with no need for in-person activities. *(Updated December 2013)*

ONLINE COURSE REVIEW

Can eligible entities leverage course reviews conducted by other organizations provided that those reviews include evaluations against the iNACOL quality standards?

Yes. When an eligible entity adds a course syllabus to Michigan's Online Course Catalog, it is vouching for the quality of the online course. If the entity chooses to forego conducting its own review and instead accepts a review conducted by another organization, that is its choice. If an eligible entity decides to use the results of a review conducted by another organization, it should confirm that the process used to conduct the review is in line with the guidelines and model review process for Michigan available at: (http://media.mivu.org/institute/pdf/guidelines_model_2013.pdf). If the review was conducted by an out-of-state organization, the eligible entity should confirm that the content portions of the review used the applicable Michigan curricular standards. If the organization did not, the eligible entity should re-review those portions of the standards. Please note that MVU modified the scoring system using the same iNACOL standards. Instead of the five-point scale (0, 1, 2, 3, 4) iNACOL originally suggested, the review process for the online courses in Michigan will use a three-point scale. Reviewers will be asked to rate a standard as "Not Met," "Partially Met," or "Fully Met." This new rating system simplifies categories both for reviewers and consumers of the reviews. *(Updated November 2015)*

Will the Michigan Department of Education or Michigan Virtual University approve or reject online courses before they are included in the statewide catalog?

No. Neither the Michigan Department of Education nor the Michigan Virtual University has the authority in legislation to approve or reject courses included in the statewide catalog. *(Updated August 2013)*

STATEWIDE CATALOG (MICOURSES.ORG)

What online courses may a student select from when making enrollment decisions?

Students may select courses from the online course catalog published by the primary district, or they may select courses from the statewide catalog of online courses (available at <https://micourses.org>) that contains the courses found in the primary district catalog in addition to courses published statewide by other eligible entities. *(Updated September 2014)*

Will districts be able to identify course titles in the statewide catalog that can be included in their local catalog as a strategy to recommend certain courses to students and parents?

Yes. The statewide catalog of courses (available at <https://micourses.org>) allows districts to select individual course titles that appear in the statewide catalog and have them show up in their local district catalog. Districts may want to use this feature to let students and parents know which offerings in the statewide catalog are recognized by the district as high quality or preferred based on previous experience. *(Updated September 2014)*

Once a student selects an online course and the district approves it, will the statewide catalog offer enrollment and registration services?

No. The statewide catalog provides a link to the site that explains and/or manages the enrollment and registration process for each course title. However, work is ongoing to add this functionality to the catalog for the 2016-17 school year. *(Updated November 2015)*

Are there certain times of the year when eligible entities are prevented from adding new course syllabi to Michigan's Online Course Catalog (available at <https://micourses.org>)?

No. Eligible entities can add online course syllabi to the statewide catalog at any time. *(Updated September 2014)*

Will the statewide catalog of online courses include performance data?

Yes. The catalog includes: 1) the number of enrollments in each online course in the previous school year; 2) the number of enrollments that earned 60% or more of the total course points for each online course in the previous school year; 3) and the completion rate for each online course. *(Updated September 2014)*

COURSE COST AND PAYMENT

How are Section 21f online enrollments paid for?

Section 21f requires primary districts to use their foundation allowance or per pupil funds calculated in the State School Aid Act to pay for the expenses associated with the online course(s). Districts are not required to pay more than 6.67% of the state's minimum foundation allowance or per pupil payment as calculated in the State School Aid Act for the current fiscal year. For example, using the state's minimum foundation allowance of \$7,391 for the 2015-16 school year, a district is not required to pay more than \$492.97 for an online course. Parents may choose to pay the cost difference for the online course if it exceeds the district's maximum cost obligation. *(Updated November 2015)*

Are eligible entities required to price their online courses that appear in the Michigan online course catalog at an amount equal to 6.67% of the state's minimum foundation allowance?

No. Eligible entities have discretion to establish a price for their online courses. *(Updated September 2014)*

Given that our district does not operate under a traditional six hour schedule (block), can we establish a payment ceiling for online courses that is different than the 6.67% payment rule outlined in Section 21 of the State School Aid Act?

No. *(Updated September 2014)*

Section 21f (10) requires districts to use its foundation allowance or per pupil funds to “pay for expenses associated with the online course or courses” and to cover the “cost of the online course.” What are the eligible expenses associated with an online course that can be covered by the 6.67%?

The cost of an online course is tied to the direct expenses associated with paying for it through enrollment/tuition fees and includes required course materials such as learning kits or textbooks that are in addition to the enrollment/tuition fees. *(Updated September 2014)*

Is the amount a district pays for the online course different depending on whether or not the student successfully completes the course?

No. The formula of paying 80% for enrollment and 20% if the student successfully completes the online course was removed in 2015. *(Updated November 2015)*

PROVIDING DISTRICT RESPONSIBILITIES

What responsibilities do districts and ISDs assume when they decide to offer online courses under Section 21f?

In addition to determining if the eligible entity will accept online enrollments from nonresident students, an eligible entity must:

1. Provide the Michigan Virtual University (MVU) with the course syllabus in a form and method prescribed by the Michigan Department of Education for inclusion in a statewide catalog to be managed by MVU;
2. Assign to each pupil a teacher of record and provide the primary district with the personal identification code (PIC) for the teacher of record;
3. Provide on its publically accessible website a link to the course syllabi for all of the online courses offered by the district and a link to the statewide catalog maintained by MVU;
4. Offer the online course(s) in an open entry and exit method, or aligned to a semester, trimester, or accelerated academic term.
5. Not later than October 1, 2015, provide the Michigan Virtual University with the number of enrollments in each course the district or intermediate school district offered to pupils pursuant to this section in the immediately preceding school year, and the number of enrollments in which the pupil earned 60% or more of the total course points for each online course. *(Updated November 2015)*

What are the requirements for a teacher of record of an online course?

A teacher of record must:

1. Hold a valid Michigan teaching certificate;
2. If applicable, be endorsed in the subject area and grade of the online course;
3. Be responsible for providing instruction, determining instructional methods for each pupil, diagnosing learning needs, assessing pupil learning, prescribing intervention strategies, reporting outcomes, and evaluating the effects of instruction and support strategies. *(Updated November 2015)*

What responsibilities do community colleges assume when they decide to offer online courses under Section 21f?

Community colleges must:

1. Provide the Michigan Virtual University (MVU) with the course syllabus in a form and method prescribed by the Michigan Virtual University for inclusion in a statewide online course catalog;
2. Offer the online course(s) on an open entry and open exit method, or aligned to a semester, trimester, or accelerated academic term;
3. Ensure that each online course they provide under Section 21f generates postsecondary credit;
4. Beginning with October 1, 2016, and by October 1 of each year thereafter, provide the Michigan Virtual University (MVU) with the number of enrollments in each online course the community college provided to pupils pursuant to this section in the immediately preceding school year, and the number of enrollments in which the pupil earned 60% or more of the total course points for each online course;
5. Ensure that each online course provided under Section 21f is taught by an instructor employed by or contracted through the Community College. *(Updated November 2015)*

Are Section 21f enrollments through a community college considered dual enrollment under PA 160?

No. Provided that the community college course is included in Michigan’s Online Course Catalog (<https://micourses.org>), the course is eligible for a school district to claim under Section 21f and therefore is subject to the requirements of Section 21f as opposed to the dual enrollment legislation. However, if the courses are not included in Michigan’s Online Course Catalog, they are not eligible under Section 21f, and therefore would need to follow the rules for dual enrollment. *(Updated November 2015)*

What happens if the enrollment demand for an online course(s) in the statewide catalog exceeds the eligible entity’s capacity to provide the online course(s)?

If the number of nonresident applicants exceeds the eligible entity’s capacity to provide the online course(s), the entity must use a random draw system, subject to the need to abide by state and national antidiscrimination laws and court orders. An open enrollment period will be identified for each online course syllabus that appears in the statewide catalog. This information will help districts make a determination in a timely fashion to accept/process enrollments or utilize a random draw system if demand for a particular course exceeds capacity. *(Updated August 2013)*

Can enrollments in online courses generate an increase in a district’s full-time equivalent count for students?

No. Under Section 21f, the enrollment of a student in one or more online courses cannot result in a pupil being counted as more than 1.0 full-time equivalent (FTE) pupil. *(Updated August 2013)*

Can eligible entities partner with other public and private organizations to support their efforts in offering online courses to resident and nonresident students?

Yes, eligible entities can use locally developed online learning solutions and/or contract with third party providers for content, delivery and support services. *(Updated August 2013)*

Can a district continue to offer online course options that are not directly taught by a Michigan certificated teacher?

Yes. While these courses are not allowable under Section 21f, the course may be allowable under one of the options outlined in Section 5-O-A of the Pupil Accounting Manual. The district would be responsible for providing a certified teacher if the course is being claimed for membership. *(Updated November 2015)*

Can an eligible entity restrict their course enrollments to a subset of districts in the state?

No. An eligible entity has the option of limiting enrollments to only their pupils, or allow for any eligible pupil statewide to enroll in the course. Section 21f, subsection 4, allows for a district to determine whether it will or will not accept enrollment from non-resident pupils. In such cases where enrollment demand exceeds enrollment capacity, subsection 4 allows for an eligible entity to deny enrollments, but only through the use of a random draw system. *(Updated September 2014)*

DISTRICTS WHOSE STUDENTS ENROLL IN 21F COURSES (PRIMARY DISTRICTS)

When must a pupil request enrollment in an online course?

Unless the pupil is newly enrolled in the pupil's primary district, the request for online course enrollment must be made in the academic term, semester, trimester, or summer preceding the enrollment. *(Updated September 2014)*

What kind of access to technology does a district need to provide students enrolled in online courses?

A student enrolled in an online course must be provided the same rights and access to technology in his or her primary district's school facilities as all other pupils enrolled in the district. The primary district is the district that enrolls the pupil and reports the pupil as a full-time equated pupil for pupil membership purposes. *(Updated September 2014)*

Are districts required to provide supervision for online students?

Yes. A pupil's primary district must assign to the pupil a mentor to monitor the pupil's progress during the online course and shall supply the providing district with the mentor's contact information. A mentor must be a professional employee of the district who monitors the pupil's progress, ensures the pupil has access to needed technology, is available for assistance, and ensures access to the teacher of record. Some districts may already have established a policy or comprehensive mentoring program if they previously offered courses in a self-scheduled format as allowed by pupil accounting rule 340.11. If a district is new to self-scheduled learning, the district should seek appropriate advice on what arrangement would best serve the educational interests of their students. *(Updated November 2015)*

Can districts require students taking 21f courses to be offsite and/or to remain physically in their school building? Also, do parents have the right to demand that students be offsite to take their 21f courses?

Schools are encouraged to adopt local procedures that outline when and where students may access their 21f courses. Districts may want to seek legal counsel before making a decision to deny students access to school facilities during the normal school day while they are enrolled in one or more online courses. *(Updated September 2014)*

Can districts require students enrolled in online courses under Section 21f to take a local end-of-course exam as a condition for granting academic credit?

Successful completion of an online course is determined by the pupil's primary educating district. If a district elects to implement an end-of-course exam, it is recommended that they use the same procedures and weighting methods as they do for face-to-face courses. Caution should be exercised to ensure that additional requirements are free of bias that would unfairly impact online students. *(Updated September 2014)*

If a student takes an online course from another eligible entity identified in the statewide catalog, how should his/her local district record this on a student transcript? Do they have to accept the letter grade?

When it comes to determining the letter grade included on the transcript, districts should abide by their district policies or guidelines or create new ones to address this issue. Some districts may treat Section 21f courses the same way they do with recording credits for a new transfer student. Under Section 21f, a district is required to “grant appropriate academic credit and shall count that credit toward completion of graduation and subject area requirements” as well as “identify the online course title as it appears in the online course syllabus.” *(Updated December 2013)*

Are districts required to grant credit for successful online course completions?

Yes. Districts must grant appropriate academic credit for successful online course completions and must count that credit toward completion of graduation and subject area requirements. In addition, a student’s record and transcript must identify the online course title as it appears in the online course syllabus. *(Updated August 2013)*

Will the Michigan Department of Education or MVU make a recommendation to schools on how to determine completion?

No. Eligible entities will be able to establish course completion criteria for each online course that appears in the statewide catalog. It is expected that the criteria will not be substantially different from the course completion standards used by districts or community colleges for traditional face-to-face courses. *(Updated September 2013)*

If a student takes more than one online course, is a two-way interaction log required for each course?

Only one two-way interaction log must be kept per online student no matter how many online courses the student takes. *(Updated November 2015)*

Are the two-way interaction logs only required for those Section 21f courses that are taken off-site, or do they also apply to students who take their online courses on-site with an adult present?

Two-way interaction is required for courses taken under Section 21f regardless of the student being physically present on-site or off-site. When a student is physically present, two-way interaction is satisfied when the student and the mentor are together during the class period. The mentor will indicate that the student was physically present using the attendance record and by recording the physical attendance in the activity log for those dates. *(Updated November 2015)*

What kinds of interactions are acceptable as two-way interactions?

Two-way interactions must be between either the teacher of record and the student or the mentor and the student. The interactions can occur in a variety of ways including, but not limited to, email, telephone, instant messaging, or face-to-face communication. The substance of the interactions must be about the online course or the student’s progress in the course. The interaction must be initiated by one party and responded to by the other party. *(Updated November 2015)*

REASONS TO DENY 21F ENROLLMENT REQUESTS

Can a district deny a student request to enroll in an online course?

Yes. Seven reasons are approved for denial, including:

1. The student has previously gained the credits provided from the completion of the online course;
2. The online course is not capable of generating academic credit;

3. The online course is inconsistent with the remaining graduation requirements or career interests of the student;
4. The student does not possess the prerequisite knowledge and skills to be successful in the online course or has demonstrated failure in previous online coursework in the same subject;
5. The online course is of insufficient quality or rigor. If a district denies a student enrollment because the online course is of insufficient quality or rigor, the district shall make a reasonable effort to assist the student to find an alternative online course in the same or similar subject that is of acceptable rigor and quality;
6. The cost of the online course exceeds an amount of 6.67% of the minimum foundation allowance for the current fiscal year. Should a parent choose to pay the cost difference in this case, the student may still be enrolled in the course; and
7. The course enrollment request doesn't occur within the same timelines established by the district for enrollment and schedule changes for regular courses. Unless the pupil is newly enrolled in the district, 21f enrollment requests must be made prior to the academic term in which the student would be taking the online course. *(Updated September 2014)*

A local district is allowed to reject a request for an online course if it does not match the rigor required by that district. Does that mean, for example, a district can direct parents and their child to a locally developed online course, instead of the one offered in the state catalog by another district?

Districts may suggest, but not mandate, which courses students select from the titles that appear in a local district catalog or the statewide catalog. It's the district's responsibility to ensure whatever course is chosen is of sufficient quality and rigor. *(Updated December 2013)*

Can a student be denied enrollment in an online course identified in the statewide catalog if the same course is available locally in a face-to-face or online format?

No, the legislation does not provide that scenario as a valid reason for denial of a request for enrollment under Section 21f. *(Updated December 2013)*

If a district offers online learning options that fall outside of Section 21f requirements, can the district cite these options as a reason to deny student/parent requests to enroll in online course titles found in the Michigan online course catalog?

No, offering online learning options outside of Section 21f is not listed as a reason districts can use to deny a student from enrolling in an online course in the statewide catalog. Districts may not establish additional requirements that would prohibit a pupil from taking an online course. *(Updated December 2013)*

If the primary district's academic term dates do not align to the academic term dates of a Section 21f course (for example: trimester format at the school and student wants to enroll in a semester-based online course) can the district deny enrollment in the course?

No, the legislation does not provide that scenario as a valid reason for denial of a request for enrollment under Section 21f; however, the enrollment request must be made prior to the start of the primary district's academic term in which it would be put on the student's schedule as well as during a time period in which the primary district has established for enrollment and schedule changes for regular courses. *(Updated September 2014)*

Is there an appeal process if a district denies a student’s request to enroll in an online course?

Yes. A student and his or her parents may appeal the denial by submitting a letter to the superintendent of the intermediate school district (ISD) in which the student’s primary district is located. A response to the appeal must be issued within 5 days after it is received. *(Updated August 2013)*

SCHOOL BOARDS

Do school boards have to approve the district’s online course offerings that appear in their local course catalog or titles they submit to the statewide catalog?

The district that is functioning as the online course provider under Section 21f is required to have board approval for the online courses they offer. The district that has students enrolling in an online course under Section 21f would not require board approval (unless the enrolling district and district providing the online course are the same). However, it is a district responsibility to evaluate the rigor and quality of the courses in which their students enroll. *(Updated December 2013)*

PARENTS

What are districts required to tell parents about Section 21f?

Districts must receive parental consent before allowing a student to enroll in a course under Section 21f, which would require that the district and parents be involved in the decision to enroll the student in courses under Section 21f. The legislation (subsection 7(a)) also requires districts to “provide on its publicly accessible website a link to the course syllabi for all of the online courses offered by the district and a link to the statewide catalog of online courses maintained by the Michigan virtual university.” Beyond these requirements, the legislation does not specifically address parental notification. *(Updated December 2013)*

If parents find a course in Michigan’s Online Course Catalog that they want their child to take, can they enroll their child in the online course?

No. The enrollment process is coordinated by the student’s primary educating district. *(Updated December 2013)*