

Policy Outline

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I. Policy Value Statement

The Board of Education of Howard County (Board) recognizes the value of digital education throughout the Howard County Public School System (HCPSS). The Board values the need for expanded access to learning options through supplemental and full-time digital education. Digital education provides the opportunity to access education that might otherwise not be available or provides an alternative academic option for the student.

II. Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to specify criteria for digital education courses in HCPSS which will provide students equitable access to instruction and content resources.

III. Standards

A. Digital Education

- 1. HCPSS will implement national, State, and local requirements and best practices when developing, designing, and reviewing digital education courses.
- 2. Digital education courses will be aligned with HCPSS academic standards.
- 3. Digital education courses will follow the HCPSS system calendar unless otherwise specified.

4. HCPSS digital education eligibility requirements and course availability will be made available through the HCPSS Catalog of Approved High School Courses.
5. HCPSS will use HCPSS employees who meet established criteria for digital education to teach digital education courses. When a qualified HCPSS employee is not available, the HCPSS may advertise for and establish a contract with an online learning provider to secure a non-HCPSS employed teacher.
6. Digital education students are subject to all HCPSS policies. Due to the unique nature of instruction, modifications to grading and reporting, attendance, and academic eligibility may be made and communicated prior to enrollment in accordance with Policy 8020 Grading and Reporting: Middle and High School, Policy 9010 Attendance, and Policy 9070 Academic Eligibility for High School Extracurricular Activities.
7. The Innovative Pathways Program Office will maintain and share the roster of HCPSS students concurrently enrolled with schools.
8. The Innovative Pathways Program Office will provide program data on the status of digital education as requested.

B. Supplemental Digital Education

1. HCPSS will provide enrollment requests and fee information for HCPSS and non-HCPSS supplemental digital education courses.
2. HCPSS schools must provide close supervision for students while enrolled in a supplemental digital education course at a physical school during the school day.
3. Alternative programs will provide supervision for students enrolled in supplemental digital education courses outside of the school day as appropriate.

C. Full-Time Digital Education

1. A digital education virtual program is subject to all applicable federal and State laws and regulations.
2. HCPSS employees and students working in or enrolled in a digital education virtual program are subject to the same policies as they would be at HCPSS schools.
3. Enrollment in a digital education virtual program is only available to current HCPSS enrolled students meeting the criteria outlined in Policy 9000 Student Residency, Eligibility, Enrollment and Assignment.

4. Students enrolled in a digital education virtual program are required to maintain their enrollment for the entire school year unless the parent or Innovative Pathways Program Office determines a placement change is necessary.
5. There are no fees for a digital education virtual program as it is the student's primary instruction.
6. Students enrolled in a digital education virtual program will be provided access to HCPSS programs and services such as meals, extracurricular opportunities, special education and related services.

IV. Responsibilities

- A. HCPSS will establish criteria for course instruction for digital education courses.
- B. HCPSS will assist digital education students to access the required hardware, software, and internet connectivity that are available to other HCPSS students.
- C. The Superintendent/designee will use program data to plan future course offerings and course delivery models available to HCPSS students, consistent with the standards outlined in Policy 8000 Curriculum.
- D. The Superintendent/designee will publish eligibility requirements and digital education course availability annually.
- E. The Superintendent/designee will communicate information annually regarding digital education courses to all students, parents, and HCPSS employees.
- F. The Superintendent/designee will provide program data on the status of digital education to the Board and the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE).

V. Delegation of Authority

The Superintendent is authorized to develop appropriate procedures for the implementation of this policy within the limits of this policy.

VI. Definitions

Within the context of this policy, the following definitions apply:

- A. Alternative Programs – Intervention programs managed by the Innovative Pathways Program Office.
- B. Asynchronous – A student-centered instructional method in which the student decides the time and place that the instruction is received. Students are provided a syllabus or pacing guide that outlines the learning plan. A teacher guides student learning by

providing written feedback and check-ins with students as needed. Student's complete assignments at their own pace that meet the assignment and course due dates.

- C. Blended Learning – Combines the instructional methods used in asynchronous and synchronous courses where less than 80 percent of instruction is asynchronous.
- D. Digital Education – The use of digital tools and technologies to deliver asynchronous and synchronous courses. There are two (2) types of digital education utilized by HCPSS:
 - 1. HCPSS (In-House) Digital Education – Blended or synchronous digital education that is taught by a qualified HCPSS employee.
 - 2. Non-HCPSS (External) Digital Education – Asynchronous digital education that is taught by a qualified non-HCPSS employed teacher.
- E. Digital Education Virtual Program – The education center providing full-time digital education for HCPSS students in grades 6-12.
- F. Full-Time Enrollment – Where a HCPSS student in grades 6-12 takes the majority of their instruction (more than half) through digital education.
- G. HCPSS Employee – An individual who is a permanent or temporary employee whose compensation is paid in whole or part by the Board, including but not limited to, school-based administrators, teachers, substitute teachers, paraeducators, and other school-based and Central Office support staff.
- H. Innovative Pathways Program Office – The office within the Department of Program Innovation and Student Well-Being designated to implement digital education in the HCPSS.
- I. Non-HCPSS Employed Teacher – A certificated teacher hired by an MSDE-approved online learning provider to teach asynchronous courses to HCPSS students.
- J. Online Learning Provider – A third-party vendor, institute of higher education or school district that provides digital education to students.
- K. Parent – Any one of the following, recognized as the adult(s) legally responsible for the student:
 - 1. Biological Parent – A natural parent whose parental rights have not been terminated.
 - 2. Adoptive Parent – A person who has legally adopted the student and whose parental rights have not been terminated.

3. Custodian – A person or agency appointed by the court as the legal custodian of the student and granted parental rights and responsibilities.
 4. Guardian – A person who has been placed by the court in charge of the affairs of the student and granted parental rights and responsibilities.
 5. Caregiver – An adult resident of Howard County who exercises care, custody, or control over the student but who is neither the biological parent nor legal guardian, as long as the person satisfies the requirements of the Education Article, §7-101 (c) (Informal Kinship Care) or has been issued a U.S. Department of Health and Human Services’ Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) Verification of Release form entering into a custodial arrangement with the federal government.
 6. Foster Parent – An adult approved to care for a child who has been placed in their home by a state agency or a licensed child placement agency as provided by the Family Law Article, §5-507.
- L. School Day – Day, including a partial day, when a public agency is open and students are required to be in attendance for instruction.
- M. Supplemental Enrollment – Where a HCPSS student in grades 6-12 takes fewer than half of their courses through digital education.
- N. Synchronous – A teacher-directed instructional method which happens in real time, but not necessarily in the same physical location as the student. Synchronous courses are scheduled at a specific day and time.
- O. Virtual Learning – A digital education instructional method where the majority (80 percent or more) of the instruction is synchronous.

VII. References

- A. Legal
Md. Ann. Code, Education Article, §6-121(a)
Md. Ann. Code, Education Article, §7-14A-01-§7-14A-09
Md. Ann. Code, Education Article, §7-103.2
Md. Ann. Code, Education Article, §7-901, *et seq.*
Md. Ann. Code, Education Article, §7-1002
Md. Ann. Code, Education Article, §7-1401-§7-1408
COMAR 13A.04.15
- B. Board Policies
Policy 8000 Curriculum
Policy 8020 Grading and Reporting: Middle and High School
Policy 8080 Responsible Use of Technology, Digital Tools, and Social Media
Policy 9000 Student Residency, Eligibility, Enrollment and Assignment

Policy 9010 Attendance

- C. Relevant Data Sources
- D. Other
 - Catalog of Approved High School Courses
 - Catalog of Middle School Courses
 - HCPSS Device Agreement Form
 - HCPSS Student Code of Conduct

VIII. History¹

ADOPTED: January 12, 2017

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June 6, 2024

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¹ Key: **Adopted**-Original date the Board took action to approve a policy; **Reviewed**-The date the status of a policy was assessed by the Superintendent's Standing Policy Group; **Modified**-The date the Board took action to alter a policy that based on the recommendation of the Superintendent/designee did not require a comprehensive examination; **Revised**-The date the Board took action on a policy that based on the recommendation of the Superintendent/designee needed a comprehensive examination; **Effective**-The date a policy is implemented throughout the HCPSS, typically July 1 following Board action.

I. Course Access

- A. Howard County Public School System (HCPSS) students may be eligible to enroll in HCPSS digital education under the following:
1. The school does not offer the course.
 2. There is a scheduling conflict that prevents the student from taking the course when it is available and there is no accessible alternative in future academic years.
 3. The student has been approved for early graduation or early college access demonstrated through their four-year plan.
 4. Home and Hospital Teaching Program.
 5. Administrative placement approved by a Community Superintendent.
- B. HCPSS will establish an enrollment process for non-HCPSS students to apply to enroll in HCPSS in-house digital education based on the number of available seats in published courses.
- C. HCPSS students may apply to enroll in a digital education virtual program. Enrollment is based on the availability of courses and qualified teachers.
- D. HCPSS may limit digital education supplemental and full-time enrollments for students based on the availability of funding, approved courses, and qualified teachers.
- E. The Innovative Pathways Program Office will work with HCPSS Curriculum Offices and schools to determine course needs for the following school year.

II. Enrollment Requirements

- A. Schools may assist parents in enrolling their students in digital education courses. HCPSS school-based employees may not enroll students in courses without first notifying the student and their parents.
- B. A student may enroll in up to two (2) supplemental non-HCPSS (external) digital education courses per single school year.

- C. HCPSS does not offer or accept credit recovery course credit for supplemental non-HCPSS (external) digital education courses.
- D. A student may exceed the registration course limit for digital education courses with approval from the school administrator and the Innovative Pathways Program Office.
- E. Students may enroll in a supplemental non-HCPSS (external) digital education course after the posted withdrawal deadline, which may include transfer students with an existing 0.5 credit towards a 1.0 credit course, if they are able to complete the course requirements by the posted end date.
- F. Students may enroll in a digital education virtual program after the start of the academic year through an application process.
- G. Parents of a child with an Individualized Education Program (IEP), who apply for enrollment in a digital education virtual program, will meet with the IEP Team to determine if their child's IEP can be met through the virtual learning courses.
- H. Pending program availability, students enrolled in a digital education virtual program may elect to continue their enrollment for the following school year or return to their designated home school.
- I. Students who do not successfully earn credit in digital education courses, may be denied enrollment in future courses. Parents may appeal in writing to the school administrator and the Innovative Pathways Program Office before enrolling.

III. Supervision, Attendance and Participation

- A. Schools may schedule students in digital education courses at a physical school during or outside the school day. When a digital education course is scheduled during the school day, students must be supervised by HCPSS school-based employees.

HCPSS school-based employees supervising digital education students are responsible for:

1. Recording the digital education student's daily attendance.
 2. Ensuring the health, safety, and general welfare of students.
 3. Ensuring students are accessing their course.
 4. Proctoring unit, mid-term, and final assessments.
- B. Students enrolled in a digital education virtual program who come on-site to their designated home school to access an activity, program, or services will be supervised by HCPSS school-based employees at that school.

- C. Attendance for digital education courses will apply based on how and when the course is taken:
1. During the school day, digital education student's attendance follows the process outlined in Policy 9010 Attendance.
 2. Outside the school day, digital education student's attendance is tracked for all required synchronous course sessions (orientation, proctored exams, course instruction, labs, etc.)
 3. Outside the school day, asynchronous assignments may be used to demonstrate attendance on days in which synchronous course sessions are not scheduled.
- D. Participation requirements will be communicated to the innovative pathways student prior to the beginning of the course.
1. Participation is defined as the degree to which the innovative pathways student is making adequate progress toward completing the course requirements by the posted end date.
 2. Innovative pathways students in grades 6-12 who fail to participate in their courses may be withdrawn from the digital education course in accordance with Policy 8020 Grading and Reporting: Middle and High School.
 3. Parents of students who are not making progress in a digital education virtual program may request a placement change to in-person instruction at their designated home school.
 4. All students participating in assessed digital education courses will be required to take State mandated, district-selected and district-designed assessments and surveys.
 - a. Remote participation will be offered if allowed by the assessment or survey program.
 - b. Students will be required to attend in-person testing sessions at a HCPSS school building to complete assessments or surveys that do not offer remote participation.
 - c. When students are unable to attend in-person sessions, arrangements will be made to administer assessments or surveys by HCPSS employees in an appropriate setting.

IV. Fees

- A. There are no fees for a digital education virtual program as it is the student's primary instruction. Supplemental courses taken outside of a digital education virtual program may be subject to fees and are the responsibility of the parent.
- B. HCPSS will provide fee information for HCPSS and non-HCPSS digital education supplemental courses, which may include application fees, course material fees, or tuition.
 - 1. HCPSS students who meet the eligibility requirements are not responsible for course fees.
 - 2. HCPSS students who do not meet the eligibility requirements, or exceed the registration course limit, may enroll in additional approved courses with an online learning provider under a separate agreement that requires the parent to pay any tuition or course fees.
- C. Fees for supplemental courses are non-refundable unless otherwise specified in the fee schedule. The fee schedule will include options for tuition reduction based on student circumstances.

V. Curriculum Review, Design and Development

HCPSS will use the following to inform digital education courses:

- A. The curriculum standards for HCPSS digital education courses will be the same used for all HCPSS schools.
- B. In order to offer non-HCPSS (external) digital education courses, the HCPSS will comply with COMAR. In the event a non-HCPSS (external) digital education course has not been approved by MSDE, the HCPSS may conduct a review and submit its results to MSDE for approval.
- C. The course expectations for student-to-teacher communication and academic support meet nationally recognized professional standards and are described as such in a course syllabus.

VI. HCPSS Teacher Criteria

- A. HCPSS employees teaching digital education courses will meet the certification requirements determined by the MSDE and HCPSS. Teachers will complete required professional learning focusing on digital teaching and learning.
- B. HCPSS employees teaching asynchronous digital education courses will meet the following criteria:

1. Completed online teaching preparation course.
 2. Completed a digital education mentoring experience.
- C. HCPSS will include the following contract language with the online learning provider when using non-HCPSS employed teachers to teach non-HCPSS (external) digital education courses:
1. Hold a state-level certification in the content area (for AP courses, have met the criteria for AP courses).
 2. Completed online teaching preparation course.
 3. Received satisfactory evaluation from the online learning provider.
- D. Additional HCPSS school-based employees may work with innovative pathways students in a supporting role (site-based mentor, supervising teacher, paraeducator, special educator, etc.). They may not grade student work but may provide other academic and non-academic supports.
- E. The delivery of instruction begins when the innovative pathways student interacts with the digital education teacher and related digital content and receives ongoing assistance and assessment of learning. The instruction may include approved curriculum developed by HCPSS or online learning providers.

VII. School Responsibilities

- A. Designated home schools will provide programs and services such as meals, extracurricular opportunities, special education, and related services to students enrolled in a digital education virtual program. Some services may be provided at a physical location through a face-to-face provider as determined by the IEP. The digital education virtual program will designate HCPSS school-based employees to coordinate services with the appropriate staff from the student's designated home school.
- B. HCPSS school-based employees will assist the Innovative Pathways Program Office in disseminating digital education program information to students, parents, HCPSS school-based employees, and administration. HCPSS employees may also facilitate:
1. Site-based mentoring.
 2. Scheduling digital education student supervision.
 3. Monitoring academic progress.
- C. Responsibilities can be shared between an administrator and HCPSS school-based employees. Schools will match employees with the responsibilities that best meet the needs of the students and the school.

- D. The school and the Innovative Pathways Program Office will coordinate to provide information on a student's progress and final credits earned to the student and the student's parent.

VIII. Technology Access

- A. Students using a personal device or HCPSS-owned device are responsible for the use of the device in accordance with Policy 8080 Responsible Use of Technology, Digital Tools, and Social Media and the HCPSS Student Code of Conduct.
- B. Students using an HCPSS-owned device are required to complete an HCPSS Device Agreement Form.

IX. Grading and Progress Reporting

- A. Grading and progress reporting for digital education courses will apply based on how and when the course is taken:
 - 1. Students enrolled in synchronous digital education courses during the school day are subject to the grading and reporting guidelines outlined in Policy 8020 Grading and Reporting: Middle and High School.
 - 2. Students enrolled in asynchronous and blended digital education courses are subject to the grading and reporting guidelines outlined in Policy 8020 Grading and Reporting: Middle and High School with modifications, such as:
 - a. Marking Period
 - i. The start and end dates for course instruction may be different from the traditional school calendar.
 - ii. Marking period grades will be earned by semester.
 - b. Mid-term and Final assessments

Mid-term and final assessments may be scheduled at a time outside the traditional school calendar exam window.
- B. When a course is taken as a combination of traditional face-to-face courses and digital education, the digital education grades are averaged proportionately with classroom grades and placed on the report card.
- C. Innovative pathways students are expected to monitor their own progress daily. Parents and school counselors may receive progress reports through the student, the Innovative Pathways Program Office, or the online learning provider.

X. Program Reporting

- A. HCPSS will provide program data on the status of digital education to the Board and MSDE which may include the following:
 - 1. Number of digital education student enrollment.
 - 2. Number and type of courses taken.
 - 3. Completion/retention data.
 - 4. Stakeholder survey data.
 - 5. HCPSS employee digital education teacher summary.
 - 6. Non-HCPSS employed digital education teacher summary.
- B. HCPSS will review and evaluate the course delivery models available to HCPSS students.

XI. Definitions

Within the context of these implementation procedures, the following definitions apply:

- A. Credit Recovery – Credit awarded for the completion of a course where the student was previously enrolled but did not earn credit.
- B. Designated Home School – The school appointed by virtue of a student’s attendance area as outlined in Policy 9000 Student Residency, Eligibility, Enrollment and Assignment.
- C. Individualized Education Program (IEP) – A written description of the special education and related services for a student with a disability that is developed, reviewed, and revised by the student’s IEP team.
- D. Innovative Pathways Student – A HCPSS student with a supplemental or full-time enrollment through the Innovative Pathways Program Office.

XII. History¹

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