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Independent Study and Technology-Based Instruction

LEGISLATIVE ANALYST'S OFFICE

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On Education
Hon. Marty Block, Chair





Overview of Independent Study (IS)

- Provides an Alternative to Classroom-Based Instruction**
 - Students work independently under a detailed written learning contract.
 - Contract specifies schedule for completing assignments, methods of study, resources available to student, and number of credits to be earned.

- Funding Based on Time Value of Student Work**
 - Supervising teacher equates student assignments to an equivalent number of classroom instructional hours.
 - Completion of 20 or more “equivalent hours” per week generates same funding as a classroom student.

- Can Be Offered by School Districts, County Offices of Education (COEs), and Charter Schools**
 - Approximately 146,000 students (2.4 percent of K-12 enrollment) took at least one IS course in 2011-12.
 - About one-third of students were in a district or COE program, with the remaining two-thirds of students in a charter school program.

- Instructional Format Varies Widely, but Programs Sometimes Use Technology-Based Instruction**
 - May include synchronous learning, where students and teachers interact in real time.
 - Also includes asynchronous instruction, where students and teachers interact through online means, but not at the same time.



Overview of IS

(Continued)



Includes Student-Teacher Ratio Cap

- Ratio cannot exceed the ratio for other educational programs operated by the school district. (For charter schools, cap is the higher of 25 to 1 or the ratio of the largest unified school district in the county.)



Programs Subject to Various Other Requirements

- May not enroll adults over age 21.
- May only serve students from the county where the school is located or an adjacent county.



Governor's Proposal

- Replaces Time Value Requirement With “Satisfactory Educational Progress”**
 - Supervising teachers no longer required to equate student work products to an equivalent time value.
 - Teachers would determine if students were making “satisfactory educational progress” towards a set of locally determined educational outcomes.
 - Programs would need to reevaluate the participation of any student not making satisfactory progress, but would not be required to remove the student from the program.

- Removes Student-Teacher Ratio Requirement**
 - Removes ratio requirements but still requires students to work under the supervision of a credentialed teacher.

- Simplifies Rules for IS Contracts**
 - Contracts would need to describe accountability measures and assessments used to evaluate a student, but they would not need to establish a schedule for the completion of every assignment.

- Authorizes Asynchronous Instruction Separately From IS**
 - Would create a set of rules specifically authorizing “technology-based, asynchronous instruction” for grades 9-12.
 - Requirements similar to IS, but would not have an age limit or geographic restrictions on students that may participate in the program.

- Would Make All Proposed Changes Effective Beginning in 2013-14**



LAO Concerns

- Lacks Clear Funding Mechanism**
 - No specific formula for determining how participation equates to funding.
 - Unclear how to fund students who enroll in IS part time.

- Does Not Make Funding Contingent on Educational Progress**
 - Funding would be contingent on student participation but not explicitly linked to student outcomes.

- Satisfactory Progress Too Broadly Defined**
 - Because local providers would define satisfactory academic progress, it would be virtually impossible for the state to ensure programs are of high quality.

- Missing Requirements for Asynchronous Instruction**
 - Restrictions currently applicable to IS programs, such as the age limit, would not apply to asynchronous instruction.

- Additional Time Likely Needed for Implementation**
 - Would be very difficult to implement all proposed changes by July 1, 2013.



LAO Recommendations

- Require Students Enrolled in an Asynchronous Course Be Part of an IS Program**
 - Ensures the age limit and other IS requirements also will apply to asynchronous instruction.
 - Would provide consistent rules across programs and simplify attendance tracking.

- Explicitly Link Funding to Student Learning Outcomes**
 - Establish a funding mechanism that makes funding contingent on students meeting educational outcomes established for each course.

- Require Rigorous Content-Aligned Measures and External Review of Outcome Measures**
 - Explicitly require outcome measures be linked directly to state content standards.
 - Establish a process for external review of outcome measures. For example, state could require COEs or the Superintendent of Public Instruction to approve outcome measures or establish basic statutory criteria and require compliance be part of the annual audit process.

- Delay Full Implementation Until 2014-15 and Retain Option to Use Existing IS Rules During the Next Few Years**
 - Use 2013-14 as a planning year.
 - Allow both input-based and outcome-based IS programs to operate during next few years.
 - After a few years of implementation, Legislature could determine whether outcome-based approach was successful and should replace existing input-based programs.