
STRATFORD BOARD OF EDUCATION

POLICY TITLE: ONLINE COURSES

POLICY NUMBER: #6172.6

Instruction

Virtual/Online Courses

The Board of Education believes that education through virtual/online courses or through university or college courses is an alternative (effective) means of instruction for students. A virtual school is hereby defined as an educational organization that offers courses at various grade levels through Internet or Web-based methods. These schools can offer courses to enhance, supplement or enrich the existing curriculum and can also provide an alternative means of instruction. Interactive online learning does not require the student to be physically present in the same location as the instructor or other students.

Virtual/online courses will be part of this District's educational program delivery system to increase accessibility and flexibility in the delivery of instruction. In addition to regular classroom-based instruction, students in the District may earn credit through online education provided by virtual/online courses.

In order to earn credits in meeting the requirements for high school graduation through the successful completion of online coursework, the Board, in compliance with C.G.S. 10-221a (17) shall ensure, at a minimum, that (a) the workload required by the online course is equivalent to that of a similar course taught in a traditional District classroom setting, (b) the content is rigorous and aligned with curriculum guidelines approved by the State Board of Education, where appropriate, (c) the course engages students and has interactive components, which may include, but are not limited to, required interactions between students and their teachers, participation in online demonstrations, discussion boards or virtual labs, (d) the program of instruction for such online coursework is planned, ongoing and systematic, and (e) the courses are (1) taught by teachers who are certified in the state or another state and have received training on teaching in an online environment, or (2) offered by institutions of higher education that are accredited by the Department of Higher Education or regionally accredited; or (3) toward meeting the high school graduation requirement upon the successful completion of the board examination series permitting students in grades 9 through 12 to substitute achievement of a passing score on a series of examinations approved by the State Board of Education for meeting credit requirements for graduation.

Virtual/online courses link to district mission/goals/strategies focusing on student achievement and accountability.

The Board of Education recognizes students may benefit from online courses or post-secondary courses to assist students in obtaining credits necessary to earn a diploma, to maintain academic standings, or to provide enrichment for those who might require special courses.

The District will not use online courses as the sole medium for instruction in any required subject area for students in grades K-12.

High school students may earn a maximum of four units of academic credit to be applied toward graduation requirements by completing online courses through agencies approved by the Board unless the Principal waives that provision in writing stating the reasons why, citing whatever circumstances that has caused this waiver. [refer to Transfer of Credits shall be governed by policy #6172.61]

Credit from an online or virtual course or a university/college course may be earned only in the following circumstances:

1. The course is not offered at the District's high school.
2. The high school does offer the course, but the student is unable to take it due to an unavoidable scheduling conflict.
3. The course will serve as an alternative or a supplement to extended homebound instruction.
4. The student is unable to attend courses in a regular school setting, and the student has been offered an alternative educational opportunity due to disciplinary or medical limitations.
5. The Principal, with agreement from the student's teachers and parents/guardians, determines the student requires a differentiated or accelerated learning environment. These students must be enrolled in the District and take the courses during the regular school day at the school site.
6. A student has failed a course and wishes to recover credits in that course area.
7. The student's PPT or Section 504 Team has determined it to be an appropriate means of instruction.

As determined by Board/school policy, students applying for permission to take a virtual/online course will do the following:

- Complete prerequisites and provide teacher/counselor recommendations to confirm the student possesses the maturity level to function effectively in an online/college learning environment.
- Obtain the written approval of the Principal or his/her designee before a student enrolls in a virtual course or the university/college course.
- Adhere to the District code of conduct to include rules of behavior and consequences for violations.
- Adhere to attendance requirements of the District.

Requests for approval to take an online course for secondary credit must be submitted to the school principal prior to enrolling in the course. Approval will only be made for online courses taken through a provider that is approved by the governing state education department or a regional accrediting agency recognized by the US Department of Education. The school principal, in consultation with guidance and departmental staff, shall make the final determination as to the acceptability of the course. Consideration by the principal and school staff should include the educational workload of the student, the student's post-secondary educational goals, the student's prior educational record and the quality and curriculum of the online course. The school must receive an official record of the final grade before awarding credit toward graduation. Only approved courses shall be posted on student transcripts.

The Stratford Board of Education will annually allocate a specific amount of funds for the reimbursement of online courses taken by students. These funds will be used to reimburse the families of students taking online courses for the cost of tuition subject to the following guidelines:

1. For online courses that are taken to recover credit in courses for which the student had previously enrolled and failed, withdrawn or lost credit, 50% tuition reimbursement will be provided upon receipt of an official transcript showing that the student passed the course.

2. For online courses taken to earn credit in a course for which the student has not been previously enrolled, 75% tuition reimbursement will be provided upon receipt of an official transcript showing that the student passed the course.
3. For online courses taken to earn credit in a course for which the homebound student has not been previously enrolled, 100% tuition reimbursement will be provided upon receipt of an official transcript showing that the student passed the course.
4. No reimbursement will be made for online courses in which the student enrolled, but did not complete with a passing grade. Students and parents should be made aware of this policy and its intent to promote and encourage alternative learning opportunities for students utilizing technology.
5. To be eligible for tuition reimbursement, the online course(s) must have been approved by the school principal as described above.
6. Under no circumstances will total tuition reimbursements exceed the amount of funding allocated by the Stratford Board of Education.
7. Tuition for online courses will only be reimbursed during the school year in which the course was taken.
8. Families of students submitting for reimbursement for online courses will be reimbursed on a “first-come, first-served” basis determined by the date that a completed reimbursement request is received in the Office of the Superintendent.

Through its policies and/or supervision plan, the school shall be responsible for providing appropriate supervision and monitoring of students taking virtual courses.

Students will have access to sufficient library media resources such as a “virtual library” available through the World Wide Web, laboratory facilities, technical assistance, and hands-on training and information.

District Review Committee

The Superintendent shall establish a committee to review all online education courses prior to use by the District.