CNMI Public School System Remote/Online Learning Instructional Equivalency Policy

Executive Summary

Purpose

The purpose for this policy is to amend BOE Policy *§60-20-505 on Instructional Time* to:

1. Establish recommended guidelines on instructional time equivalencies for remote/online learning.
2. Authorize remote/online learning frameworks in response to emergencies to ensure learning continuity.
3. Include language to address current remote/online learning programs.

Overview

Current Remote Learning Synopsis

The CNMI Public School System has been providing remote instruction since 2011 with the inception of the Distance Education Program. The program began in response to teacher shortages at the high school level, which hampered students' ability to complete graduation requirements. The need was greatest for students on Rota and Tinian. Distance learning became the solution to this problem.

What began as the Distance Education Program has since evolved significantly. It is now the Office of Instructional Technology & Distance Education, which provides a myriad of online services to support both students and professionals alike. Its core branches include 1) Student Portal, 2) Professional Portal, 3) Educational Technology Training Program, and 4) Aspiring Leaders Program. What was formerly Distance Education is now the Student Portal, offering the full scope of high school core curricular courses and a host of electives as well as Advanced Placement options to both public and private school students throughout the CNMI. This branch alone serves an average population of 1,841 students annually. In the past three years, enrollment has increased by 27%. The remaining three branches of Instructional Technology & Distance Education serve professionals seeking certification and professional development. Remote learning's impact on teaching and learning for students and professionals alike has solidified its place as a learning mode to complement traditional, face-to-face instruction as well as support bolster retention of highly qualified staff.

Remote Learning in Response to COVID-19

In light of COVID-19, the Public School System will operationalize its internal capacity to provide remote learning for continuity of education. In the absence of a vaccine, a growing number of cases in the CNMI, limited resources and human capital, and an inadequate healthcare infrastructure at the school level, remote learning will ensure optimal safety for its 10,000 students and 1,000 personnel.

At present, remote learning will be the primary mode of instruction for a majority of the student population. A hybrid form of intervention will be considered on a case by case basis for instruction for identified students, which may include students with special needs or extenuating circumstances.

Remote Learning Instructional Time Equivalences

There are implications for the interpretation of instructional time in the online environment. In the traditional classroom setting, instructional minutes refer to the time spent in the physical classroom space. In a remote learning environment, instructional time cannot mirror this precedent as the model of teaching and learning is different. To account for these differences, many courses now include technology components and other types of activities as part of instructional time.

As such, there is an urgent need to amend the BOE Policy *§60-20-505 on Instructional Time* to include language to address current remote learning programs and practices, authorize remote learning frameworks in response to emergencies to ensure learning continuity, and establish recommended guidelines on instructional time equivalencies for remote learning.

Recommended policy amendment

Request to amend §60-20-505 on instructional time to include the policy statement as follows:

The Commissioner of Education shall have the authority to institute remote learning forms of instruction for the purpose of learning continuity.

Clarifying Terminology:

- **Remote Learning**: Remote learning, also referred to as distance learning or distance education, is a field of education that focuses on the pedagogy, technology, and instructional systems design that is effectively incorporated in delivering education to students who are not physically "on site" to receive their education. Instead, teachers and students may communicate asynchronously or synchronously. Distance education courses that require a physical on-site presence for any reason are considered to be a hybrid course.

- **Hybrid learning**: An approach to education that combines online educational materials and opportunities for interaction online with traditional place-based classroom methods.
- **Instructional Time:** Instructional time is the unit of measuring educational credit, usually based on the number of instructional minutes or hours per day throughout a term.
- **Asynchronous learning**: A general term used to describe forms of education, instruction, and learning that do not occur in the same place or at the same time.
- **Synchronous learning:** A general term used to describe forms of education, instruction, and learning that occur at the same time, but not in the same place.

Remote Learning Instructional Equivalencies

BOE Policy *§60-20-505 on Instructional Time* refers to the instructional minutes spent in the traditional face-to-face setting which cannot be applied to remote learning given the differences between the two modes of instruction. This information below will provide recommendations and considerations for equivalencies for the remote mode of learning.

Instructional Time Equivalency Chart

The list of learning activities outlined below should be considered when replacing instructional minutes in a traditional, face-to-face course with a hybrid or fully remote mode of learning for the purpose of instructional time equivalency. The examples below are just some, but by no means all, of the options that may be used:

ACTIVITY	DESCRIPTION	INSTRUCTIONAL MINUTES EQUIVALENCY
Communication & Class Participation		
Blogs, journals, discussion forums, wikis, or alternative forms of engagement that are student centered.	Opportunity for students to apply learned concepts or reflect on learning experiences; shared with instructor and/or in a public forum for analysis, feedback and assessment. Can be used for class or group projects or feedback after instruction.	30 - 60 minutes as determined by teacher
Web Conferencing	Instructor led video streaming instruction for collaborative, synchronous learning with specific expectations for participation and feedback.	Time allotted for web conferencing = instructional time

Virtual Meeting Rooms	Instructor or student led opportunities. Can be used for class or group projects or feedback after instruction. Provides for collaborative, synchronous learning with specific expectations for participation & feedback as well as possible asynchronous learning where post-review and discussion posts can assist in reflection. Where possible, chats should be posted for archive review.	Time allotted for web conferencing = instructional time
Online Simulations	Examination and exploration requiring utilization of critical thinking skills which relate to course objectives. Analysis is shared with instructor and/or class with posts.	60 - 120 minutes as determined by teacher
Collaboration & Peer Review		
Group project	Activity with specific learning objectives that is instructor mediated; students collaborate using electronic methods to research, analyze, synthesize, and prepare projects with instructors receiving periodic updates and providing guidance to a group.	30 - 60 minutes per week for duration of project as determined by teacher
Guided project	Individual activity with specific learning objectives that is instructor mediated; student and facilitator collaborate using electronic methods and/or face-to-face to research, analyze, synthesize and prepare project with instructor receiving periodic updates and providing guidance and feedback.	30 - 60 minutes per week for duration of project as determined by teacher
Asynchronous Student Presentations	Web 2.0 and apps that engage students in online collaboration and peer critiques via programs like Voicethread, website creation tools, student-created posted videos, etc. This is an electronic substitute for in-class presentation time.	Time allotted for presentation = instructional time
Synchronous Student Presentations	Presentations done via web conferencing. Gives the class opportunity for participation and direct feedback. Should be archived when possible for This is an electronic substitute for in- class presentation time.	Time allotted for presentation = instructional time

Direct Instruction		
Synchronous Lecture/Web Conferencing	Instructor led instruction using web conferencing for synchronous learning using web conferencing like Adobe Connect. Gives students opportunity for participation and feedback. Should be archived when possible for review.	Time allotted for virtual lecture = instructional time
Asynchronous Lecture	Asynchronous instruction using instructor-created resources such as narrated PowerPoints, written notes and screencasting. Gives students opportunity for comment and discussion through posts or chat room discussions. See Post or Chat equivalency above if this option is given.	Time allotted for asynchronous lecture = instructional time
Instructional videos	Instructors mediated to expand upon and clarify course concepts and objectives.	Length of Video = instruction time
Assessment		
Online quizzes	Informal assessment tool to assess knowledge and provide feedback on progress.	Time allotted for assessment = instructional time
Reflection paper/ article review	Writing assignment that requires submission of a draft for instructor comment and suggestions for improvement. Should be a guided activity for students to apply learned concepts or apply higher order analytic skills to assess scholarly articles.	30 - 60 minutes as determined by teacher
Service-learning project	Instructor led service project with specific learning objectives that integrates community service with academic study; faculty provides guidance, support, and feedback to students; and students share their experience and reflection with fellow classmates via emails, chats, discussion boards, and/or face-to-face.	30 - 60 minutes per week for duration of project as determined by teacher

Remote Learning Minimum & Maximum Instructional Minutes

The amount of direct instructional minutes is inclusive of remote interaction and assigned work. This is not inclusive of non-graded enrichment opportunities, which the district encourages teachers and families to provide. The table below could be inclusive of project time that spans multiple days, independent work, and direct teacher

engagement. The following recommendations and guidelines are presented as suggested minimum and maximum times of engagement by each student in remote learning activities

Grade Level	Daily Minimum	Daily Maximum
Pre K	20 minutes/day	60 minutes/day
K - 2	30 minutes/day	90 minutes/date
3 - 5	60 minutes/day	120 minutes/day
6 - 8	Class: 20 minutes/day Total: 120 minutes/day	Class: 30 minutes/day Total: 180 minutes/day
9 - 12	Class: 30 minutes/day Total: 180 minutes/day	Class: 45 minutes/day Total: 270 minutes/day

Extended Learning Opportunities: The district encourages teachers to give additional optional work, engagement opportunities, and enrichment opportunities as long as it is made clear to students and families that the work is optional and will not negatively impact a student's grade.

Remote Learning Instructional Considerations by Grade Level

The recommendations below will address the varying developmental stages of students, student engagement, family involvement, and assessment modifications when facilitating instruction for remote learning. These recommendations factor in differing levels of home technology resources, services for students with special needs, home support, and social-emotional learning. The following are grade-level appropriate considerations:

- **Pre-K - 2nd Grade:** To support student engagement, educators will focus on strengthening the existing relationship with families. Students will be engaged in play-based family learning experiences. Educators will provide students and families with learning activity options for flexibility and engagement, including technology and non-technology based options, as well as provide a consistent daily routine. Assessment at the Pre-K through second grade level will focus on children's learning processes and progress, rather than on assignment completion and due dates. The use of artifacts that demonstrate evidence of learning will enable educators to provide relevant feedback for learning (ex: photos of artifacts, family phone calls, video of child's skills).

- **3rd - 5th Grade:** Educators will focus on providing students with cross-curricular experiences that include multiple subject areas. Teachers will make regular contact with students through a variety of methods that are appropriate to the needs and accessibility of each family and child. In addition to online learning activities, educators will provide indoor and outdoor opportunities for learning that may include journaling, academic activities, social engagement activities, and hands-on activities. Assessment will focus on the continuation of learning. Educators and families will focus on learning goals and emphasis will be placed on feedback rather than assignment of grades. Examples of appropriate assessments include performance-based tasks, portfolios, journals, discussion posts, video responses, audio recordings, projects, and other artifacts.

- **6th - 8th Grade:** To ensure equal access to all students, educators will provide technology-based instructional activities with low to high technology options. Outreach to all families will be conducted to help families support their children at home. Educators will take into consideration best practices for student engagement with recommendations that the combined daily instructional task(s) for students in grades 6-8 not exceed 2-3 hours a day in total. Educators can embed Content Area Days where certain days specific subjects, such as Math and ELA are scheduled on Monday and Science and Social Studies are scheduled on Tuesday, thus asking students to sharpen their skills and knowledge in focused content areas per day. The framework will include Virtual Collaborative Planning days for teachers to meet online as grade-level teams for instructional planning and intervention. Assessment activities will focus on the continuation of learning and addressing any gaps in learning. Educators and families will focus on learning goals and emphasis will be placed on feedback rather than assignment of grades. Examples of appropriate learning activities include, performance-based tasks, portfolios, journals, discussion posts, video responses, audio recordings, projects, and other artifacts.

- **9th - 12th Grade:** To ensure equal access to all students, educators will provide technology-based instructional activities with low to high technology options. Outreach to all families will be conducted to help families support their children. Educators will take into consideration best practices for student engagement with recommendation that the combined daily instructional task(s) for students in grades 9-12 not exceed 3-4 hours a day in total. Educators can embed Content Area Days where certain days specific subjects such as Math and ELA on Monday and Science and Social Studies on Tuesday, thus asking students to sharpen their skills and knowledge in focused content areas per day. The framework will include Virtual Collaborative Planning days for teachers to meet virtually as grade-level teams for instructional planning and intervention. Assessment activities will focus on the continuation of learning and addressing learning gaps. Educators and families will focus on learning goals and emphasis will be placed on feedback rather than assignment of grades. Examples of appropriate assessments include performance-based tasks, portfolios, journals,

discussion posts, video responses, audio recordings, projects, choice boards, and other artifacts. Emphasis will be placed on aligning learning targets with college and career goals to create pathways for post-secondary transition readiness.