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Novato Charter School (NCS)
Independent Study Policy

While Novato Charter School (NCS) is primarily dedicated to offering a classroom-based program, the Board of NCS authorizes Independent Study as an optional alternative instructional strategy for students enrolled in Transitional Kindergarten through Eighth Grades as a means for students in certain circumstances to pursue curriculum objectives outside the regular classroom. It is the intent of the NCS Board that the prospective Independent Study student understands the requirements for Independent Study and is prepared to meet them.

Each student's independent study shall be coordinated, evaluated, and carried out under the general supervision of a school employee who possesses a valid certification document or credential pursuant to applicable state laws, and who consents to the assignment. The responsibilities of the supervising teacher shall include, but are not limited to:

1. Completing designated portions of the written agreement and signing the agreement
2. Supervising and approving coursework and assignments
3. Maintaining records of student assignments showing the date the assignment is given and the date the assignment is due
4. Providing direct instruction and counsel as necessary for individual student success
5. Regularly meeting with the student to discuss the student's progress
6. Assessing student work and assigning grades or other approved measures of achievement
7. Documenting each student's attendance and participation in live interaction and/or synchronous instruction as applicable

Student participation in independent study shall be voluntary and no student shall be required to participate. Independent study provides a means for students in certain circumstances to pursue curriculum objectives outside the regular classroom.

The Board authorizes a short-term independent study program only. The length of an independent study program shall be a minimum of 1 day and not more than 14 (cumulative throughout the school year) school days. A request for independent study must be received at least one (1) school day before the commencement of the absence, except as otherwise

approved by the Administrator.

The Administrator will consider specific instances for a long-term independent study program of 15 or more school days only when an event arises that would cause a significant impact to the larger community without a long-term Independent Study program. In the event a long-term independent study program is considered, the Administrator will consult with the NCS Board of Directors The final decision of the Administrator and Board of Directors will determine whether to initiate a long-term (15 days or more) Independent Study program. . The Administrator's decision will be based on non-discriminatory factors and will consider, at a minimum, whether the reason for the request was unavoidable, whether the NCS has staff available to provide the services required in a long-term independent study program, and whether the long-term independent study request will undermine the classroom-based program in any way.

Independent study assignments shall allow no more than five (5) school days after assigned until the assignment must be completed and returned to the teacher for evaluation. When necessary based on the specific circumstances of the student's approved program, the Administrator or designee may allow for a longer period of time between the date an assignment is made and when it is due. However, in no event shall the due date of an assignment be extended beyond the termination date specified in the student's written agreement.

The Administrator or designee shall ensure that students participating in independent study are provided with content aligned to grade level standards at a level of quality and intellectual challenge substantially equivalent to in person instruction.

Other than providing access to Internet connectivity and school-owned devices adequate to participate in independent study and complete assigned work consistent with Education Code section 51747, NCS shall not provide independent study students and their parents/guardians with funds or items of value that are not provided for other students and their parents/guardians.

Requirements for Long-Term Independent Study Only (15 or more school days)

1. **Synchronous Instruction**
   The Administrator or designee shall ensure that all students participating in independent study for 15 school days or more receive the following throughout the school year:
   1. For students in grades transitional kindergarten, kindergarten, and grades 1 to 3, opportunities for daily synchronous instruction
   2. For students in grades 4-8, opportunities for both daily live interaction and at least weekly synchronous instruction
2. **Tiered Reengagement**
   The Administrator or designee shall ensure that procedures for tiered reengagement

strategies are used for all students participating in an independent study program for 15 school days or more who are:

1. Not generating attendance for more than ten percent of required minimum instructional time over four continuous weeks of the district's approved instructional calendar;
2. Not participating in synchronous instructional offerings pursuant to Education Code 51747.5 for more than 50 percent of the scheduled times of synchronous instruction in a school month as applicable by grade span; or
3. In violation of their written agreement.

Tiered reengagement strategies procedures shall include local programs intended to address chronic absenteeism, as applicable, including but not limited to the following:

1. Verification of current contact information for each enrolled student
2. Notification to parents/guardians of lack of participation within one school day of the recording of a nonattendance day or lack of participation
3. A plan for outreach from the school to determine student needs, including connection with health and social services as necessary
4. A clear standard for requiring a pupil-parent-educator conference to review a pupil's written agreement, and reconsider the independent study program's impact on the pupil's achievement and well-being, consistent with the policies adopted herein

3. **Transition back to In-Person Instruction**
   The Administrator or designee shall, for students who participate in an independent study program for 15 or more school days, develop a plan to transition students whose families wish to return to in-person instruction from independent study expeditiously, and in no case later than five instructional days.

   When any student enrolled in classroom-based instruction is participating in independent study due to necessary medical treatment or inpatient treatment for mental health or substance abuse under the care of appropriately licensed professionals, the student shall be exempt from the live interaction and/or synchronous instruction, tiered reengagement strategies, and transition back to in-person instruction requirements specified above. In such cases, evidence from appropriately licensed professionals of the student's need to participate in independent study shall be submitted to the Administrator or designee.

Required Conferences (both Short and Long Term Independent Study)

Upon the request of the parent/guardian of a student, and before signing a written agreement as described below in the section "Master Agreement," NCS shall conduct a telephone, videoconference, or in-person student-parent-educator conference or other meeting during which the student, parent/guardian, and, if requested by the parent/guardian an advocate, may ask questions about the educational options, including which curriculum offerings and

nonacademic supports will be available to the student in independent study.

An evaluation shall be conducted to determine whether it is in a student's best interest to remain in independent study whenever the student fails to make satisfactory educational progress and/or misses three assignments. In accordance with Education Code section 51747, satisfactory educational progress shall be determined based on all of the following indicators:

1. The student's achievement and engagement in the independent study program, as indicated by the student's performance on applicable student-level measures of student achievement and engagement specified in Education Code 52060
2. The completion of assignments, assessments, or other indicators that evidence that the student is working on assignments
3. Learning of required concepts, as determined by the supervising teacher
4. Progress towards successful completion of the course of study or individual course, as determined by the supervising teacher

Master Agreement (both Short and Long Term Independent Study)

A written independent study master agreement shall be developed and implemented for each participating student, and shall be maintained on file as prescribed by law. For student participation **for 15 school days or more**, the agreement shall be signed and dated and in effect before the student begins independent study. For student participation of **less than 15 school days,** a signed written agreement shall be obtained within ten days of the first day of the student's participation.

The independent study agreement for each participating student shall include general student data, including the student's name, address, grade level, birth date, school of enrollment, and program placement. The agreement also shall include, but is not limited to, all of the following:

1. The manner, time, frequency, and place for submitting the student's assignments, reporting the student's academic progress, and communicating with a student's parent or guardian regarding the student's academic progress.
2. The objectives and methods of study for the student's work and the methods used to evaluate that work.
3. The specific resources that will be made available to the student, including materials and personnel, and access to Internet connectivity and devices adequate to participate in the educational program and complete assigned work.
4. A statement of the Board's policy regarding the maximum length of time allowed between an assignment and its completion (5 days), the level of satisfactory educational progress, and the number of missed assignments

which will trigger an evaluation of whether the student should be allowed to continue in independent study.

5. The expected duration of the independent study agreement, including the beginning and end dates for the student's participation in independent study under the agreement. No independent study agreement shall be valid for any period longer than 14 school days without prior Administrator approval.
6. An evaluation as to whether it is in the student's best interest to participate in the independent study program at NCS during an extended absence whenever the student is missing three (3) or more independent study assignments. A written record of the findings of this evaluation shall be placed in the student's permanent record and shall be maintained for a period of three years from the date of the evaluation. If the student transfers to another California public school, the record shall be forwarded to that school.
7. A statement of the number of course credits or, for the elementary grades, other measures of academic accomplishment appropriate to the agreement, to be earned by the student upon completion.
8. A statement detailing the academic and other supports that will be provided to address the needs of students who are not performing at grade level, or need support in other areas, such as English learners, students with disabilities with an individualized education program or a Section 504 plan in order to be consistent with their program or plan, students in foster care or experiencing homelessness, and students requiring mental health supports.
9. A statement that independent study is an optional educational alternative in which no student may be required to participate.
10. Prior to the commencement of independent study projected to last for 15 school days or more, or within ten school days of the first day of participation for less than 15 school days, the agreement shall be signed by:
    a. the student;
    b. the student's parent, legal guardian, or caregiver, if the student is less than 18 years of age;
    c. the certificated employee who has been designated as having responsibility for the general supervision of the independent study; and
    d. the certificated employee designated as having responsibility for the special education programming of the student, as applicable.

Written agreements may be signed using an electronic signature that complies with state and federal standards, as determined by the California Department of Education (CDE). (Education Code 51747) The parent/guardian's signature on the agreement shall constitute permission for the student to receive instruction through independent study.

Students with IEPs (both Short and Long Term Independent Study)

An individual with exceptional needs may participate in independent study, if the pupil's individualized education program specifically provides for that participation. If a parent or guardian of an individual with exceptional needs requests independent study pursuant to Education Code section 51747(a)(5) (parent health concerns related to in person instruction), the pupil's individualized education program team shall make an individualized determination as to whether the pupil can receive a free appropriate public education in an independent study placement. A pupil's inability to work independently, the pupil's need for adult support, or the pupil's need for special education or related services shall not preclude the individualized education program team from determining that the pupil can receive a free appropriate education in an independent study placement.

Records (both Short and Long Term Independent Study)

NCS shall document each student's participation in live interaction and synchronous instruction pursuant to Education Code 51747 on each school day, as applicable, in whole or in part, for which live interaction or synchronous instruction is provided as part of the independent study program. A student who does not participate in scheduled live interaction or synchronous instruction shall be documented as non-participatory for that school day.

The Administrator or designee shall also maintain a written or computer-based record such as a grade book or summary document of student engagement, for each class, of all grades, assignments, and assessments for each student for independent study assignments.

Records shall be maintained at NCS for audit purposes and shall include the following:

- A copy of the NCS Board policy and procedures related to independent study.

- A file of all agreements, with representative samples of each student's work products bearing the supervising teacher's signed or initialed and dated notations indicating that he/she has personally evaluated the work or personally reviewed the evaluations made by another certificated teacher.

Public Hearing

The Board shall hold a public hearing when considering the scope of its existing or prospective use of independent study as an instructional strategy, its purposes in authorizing independent study, and factors bearing specifically on the maximum realistic lengths of assignments and acceptable number of missed assignments for specific populations of students. (5 CCR 11701)

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