

Introductory Page to Accompany the Final Project

Your Name: Anne Elisa Brown

Title of the Final Project: The Madison Central School District Distance Education Program Policy: A Recommendation

Describe the Final Project: I will be writing a sample distance education policy for the Madison School District.

Why Did You Select This For Your Final Project; How Will This Final Project Help You or Your Students/Teachers/Colleagues: This will be my first attempt at policy writing and I think the experience will be valuable not only for the research that will be involved, but for the experience at thinking about policy and how it applies to distance education.

**Describe Where the Final Project Can Be Found (attached, webpage link, blog link, multiple files etc.)
The final Project will be attached to this document.**

Any Other Comments to Include for Understanding the Final Project:

The Madison Central School District Distance Education Program Policy: A Recommendation

Introduction

The Madison Central School District, in Madison, South Dakota, offers its high school students the opportunity to participate in certain courses offered via distance education. Although the number of courses is limited, and the number of students participating is small, the district has written a distance education policy which is available to all stakeholders of the district on the district website. After a review of the policy, various strengths and weakness become apparent. The following is my review of the policy and my recommendations for a new policy.

Current Policy Strengths and Weaknesses

The first and foremost strength of the current district policy is that it exists! The distance education program for the district is relatively small and it would have been easy to overlook writing a policy for it. In the past years, only one student has completed a distance education course at Madison High School. The Technical Director for the school, Robert Honomichl, explained that because the distance education program is so small and infrequently taken advantage of, the policy is intentionally vague. The vague nature of the policy could be considered to be either a strength or a weakness depending on the perspective. Because it is vague, it can be manipulated and interpreted to apply to a range of situations. Conversely, that vague nature can also contribute to confusion, false expectations, and possible conflict. The second strength of the policy is that it does mention, (albeit briefly), three important areas: Student Application for Virtual High School Courses, Credit for Virtual Coursework, and Costs

for Virtual Coursework. Each of these areas would be of interest to stakeholders involved with the program.

Recommendations

In order to make the existing distance education policy more specific and effective, I would add several topics to the policy that aren't currently covered as well as update the three topics that are currently covered. My first step would be to interview administrators, faculty, and technical support in order to determine what goals, objectives, and needs the Madison District's Distance Education Program has. Although there is not a lot of activity now in the program, I would ask what the stakeholders imagine the program to be in the coming years. Where do they see the program going? What would they like to see the program become? Once these questions are answered, I would communicate with all stakeholders and put together a mission statement and vision statement.

In order to write the policy itself, I have selected a three tiered policy analysis framework which works well with emerging distance education programs due to its flexible nature (King, Nugent, Russell, Eich, & Lacy, 2000). The framework divides the policy into three separate tiers, each tier addressing a separate aspect of the distance education program. Within each tier are the subsections of the policy and a brief description of each subsection. This three-tiered approach will serve as an outline for my policy recommendation. The following table is an example of this framework.

Table 2. Three Tiered Policy Analysis Framework for Distance Education

Policy Area	Description
Faculty (including Continuing Education and Cooperative Extension)	Rewards (e.g., stipends, promotion and tenure, merit increases, etc.); Support (e.g., student help, technical assistance, training, etc.); Opportunities to learn about technology and new applications (e.g., release time, training, etc.); Intellectual property (e.g. ownership of materials, copyright, etc.)
Students/Participants	Support (e.g., access to technology, library resources, registration, advising, financial aid, etc.); Requirements and records (e.g., residency requirements, acceptance of courses from other places, transfer of credit, continuing education, etc.)
Management and Organization	Tuition and fee structure; Funding formula; Collaboration (e.g., with other Departments, units, institutions, consortia, intra-and inter-institutional, service areas, etc.); Resources (e.g., financial resources to support distance education, equipment, new technologies, etc.); Curricula/individual courses (e.g., delivery modes, course/program selection, plans to develop, individual sequences, course development, entire program delivery, interactivity requirements, test requirements, contact hour definitions, etc.)

(King, Nugent, Russell, Eich, & Lacy, 2000)

Policy Outline

The following is my recommended distance education policy for the Madison Central School District: (Items with an asterisk are taken directly from the current Madison policy.)

Policy Area	Description
Faculty	<p>Support:</p> <p>Faculty working directly for the Madison Central School District will be provided with the following support systems. Faculty employed by other districts/institutions will be subject to that district or institutions distance education policy.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Faculty will be offered support training for all required technologies via the district technology staff and professional development opportunities.• Faculty will be offered support for course creation via administration and professional development opportunities.• Faculty will be provided with technological assistance via the district technology staff.• Faculty will be offered mentoring opportunities with distance education instructors working for other districts and institutions.
	<p>Evaluation:</p> <p>Faculty teaching distance education courses will be subject to the district's evaluation policy which applies to all faculty.</p>

	<p>Class Size:</p> <p>Class size for distance courses offered directly by the district will not exceed 12 students.</p>
	<p>Courseload:</p> <p>Courseload for faculty working in distance education will be calculated by number of credit hours taught via distance education. In the case of a faculty member who may be teaching both via distance education and face-to-face, the courseload will be evaluated individually by the administration.</p>
	<p>Professional Development:</p> <p>Professional development opportunities will be offered to faculty throughout the year depending on budget. Faculty working with distance education will be guaranteed at least two opportunities for professional development per school year.</p>
<p>Students</p>	<p>Student Application for Distance High School Courses:</p> <p>Students applying for permission to take a virtual/online course will do the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complete prerequisites and meet with a school counselor to assess the student ability to function effectively in an online learning environment. • Complete the technology assessment orientation to assess the student's knowledge of necessary technology and/or provide assistance with technology needs. • Obtain the written approval of the Principal or his/her designee before a student enrolls in a virtual course. * • Adhere to the District Acceptable Use Policy and the MHS Student Handbook,

	<p>including rules on behavior and consequences for violations.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Adhere to MHS attendance requirements. *
	<p>Support:</p> <p>Students enrolled in on-line courses offered directly by the district will be provided with the following support systems. Students enrolled in on-line courses through other institutions will be subject to that institution’s support policies.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Students will be provided with technological support via the district technology staff.• Students will be provided with access to all district library resources.• Students will be provided with access to all district advising and counseling resources.• Students will be provided with all district registration resources.• Students will be provided with all district career counseling resources.
	<p>Costs for Virtual Coursework:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Students will not be charged for any District approved virtual/online course that is a part of the student’s full credit load for that semester. *• If a student receives approval to take a virtual/online course, and that course creates a credit overload (Student will earn more credits than the 4.0 semester full load), the student will assume full responsibility for the cost. However, if the student successfully completes the course with a “C” grade or above on the course, the fee will be refunded by the district. *

	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Students will be responsible for all costs related to virtual/online coursework that is not provided through the District. *
	<p>Grading Policies:</p> <p>Students will be subject to standard district grading policies for all courses offered via the district. For courses offered through other institutions, the students will be subject to that institution's grading policy.</p>
	<p>Course Credit:</p> <p>High school students may earn a maximum of four (4) units of academic credit unless otherwise specified in the student's Individualized Education Plan to be applied toward graduation requirements by completing virtual/online courses accredited by the South Dakota State Board of Education. Students taking such courses must be enrolled in the District. *</p> <p>Credit from an online or virtual course may be earned in the following circumstances:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The course is not offered at MHS.*• The course is offered as part of the Distance Education Program at MHS.• The high school does offer the course, but the student is unable to take it due to an unavoidable scheduling conflict. *• The course will serve as a supplement to extended homebound instruction or as part of an Individualized Education Plan Committee decision. *• The District has expelled the student from the regular school setting, but

	<p>educational services are to be continued. *</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Principal, with agreement from the student's teachers and parents/guardians, determines the student requires a differentiated or accelerated learning environment. * <p>Awarding Credit for Virtual Coursework:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The school must receive or provide an official record of the final grade before awarding credit toward graduation. Only approved courses shall be recorded on student transcripts. Credit for virtual/online coursework that a student completes prior to enrollment in the Madison Central School District will be transferred, subject to the following conditions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Virtual or online credit granted by another accredited high school will be approved and added to the student's transcript. *
Management	<p>Financial/Technology Resources:</p> <p>Financial resources to support distance education will be evaluated by a committee made up of the administration, faculty, the technology staff and the school board on a yearly basis. This committee will review funding opportunities, emerging technologies and resources, program delivery, and equipment. The committee will make recommendations to the district Board of Education yearly.</p>
	<p>Collaboration:</p> <p>Collaboration with other institutions will be considered on an individual basis.</p>

Conclusion

Currently, Madison does not have a distance education program in place. As the tide of education continues to flow toward distance education, it is my belief that the district will need to assess the benefits of a distance education program in the near future. If a distance education program were to be implemented, the policy above would serve as a preliminary framework for administrators. Due to its three-tiered nature, the policy is easily navigable. As the district distance education program grows, items can be added to the policy or revised for the policy. This recommended policy addresses issues that the current policy excludes; such as faculty issues, student support, and program management. These issues are vital for a comprehensive policy. Any educational program is best served by an extensive and detailed policy which is clear, easily implemented, and holds all parties accountable.

Works Cited

King, J. W., Nugent, G. C., Russell, E. B., Eich, J., & Lacy, D. D. (2000). Policy Frameworks for Distance Education: Implications for Decision Makers. *DLA 2000*. Callaway, Georgia.

Shelton, K., & Saltsman, G. (2005). *An Administrator's Guide to Online Education*. Greenwich, Connecticut: Information Age Publishing.