



HOUSE BILL 644: Remote Academies.

2021-2022 General Assembly

Committee:	House Education - K-12. If favorable, re-refer to Rules, Calendar, and Operations of the House	Date:	May 4, 2021
Introduced by:	Reps. Elmore, Saine, Torbett	Prepared by:	Drupti Chauhan
Analysis of:	PCS to First Edition H644-CSRQ-15		Committee Counsel

OVERVIEW: *House Bill 644 would authorize the use of remote academies by local school administrative units (LEAs). The Proposed Committee Substitute (PCS) allows certain schools that have been doing remote instruction to continue for another year and allows certain charter schools to continue blended learning for another year with the approval of the Office of Charter Schools.*

BILL ANALYSIS: SECTIONS 1-3: The PCS for House Bill 644 provides that local boards of education can apply to the State Board of Education (SBE) for approval of remote academies that meet the requirements set forth in the bill. The SBE must limit the total enrollment in all remote academies granted to an LEA to no more than 10% of the LEA's total enrollment. The following limitations also apply:

- 1 remote academy for LEAs with 15,000 or fewer students.
- 2 remote academies for LEAs with between 15,001 and 30,000 students.
- 3 remote academies for LEAs with between 30,001 and 50,000 students.
- 4 remote academies for LEAs with between 50,001 and 100,000 students.
- 5 remote academies for LEAs with more than 100,000 students.

Definition: Remote academies are public schools that provide a majority of instructional hours through remote instruction. Remote instruction is instruction that primarily uses technology to deliver the instructional content over the internet to students in a remote location both synchronously and asynchronously. Remote academies may include any combination of grade levels.

Eligibility to Attend: The following students may attend a remote academy:

- A student whose parent or guardian applies for admission for that student and commits to providing internet connectivity for that student if the student is accepted in the remote academy.
- Students with individualized education programs (IEPs) may enroll in a remote academy if the IEP team determines the remote academy is the least restrictive alternative environment for that student.
- A student on a short-term or long-term suspension from another public school who is assigned to the remote academy by the LEA when internet connectivity for the student is available.

General Provisions Governing Remote Academies:

- Remote academies must provide enrolled students with the needed hardware and software and may not charge any rental fees. Damage fees may be charged under rules adopted by the SBE.

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- Remote academies may require students to attend in-person or proctored assessments for State-mandated student assessments or to fulfill graduation requirements identified by the academy. Optional in-person meetings between students and instructors or parents and instructors are also allowed at public school facilities.
- Each approved remote academy will have a school code and will be assigned a principal.

Remote Academy Approval Process: A local board of education that wishes to offer a remote academy must submit the following in a plan to the SBE for approval:

- Considerations the LEA will make when reviewing applications to attend the remote academy.
- The range of grades for which the remote academy will offer courses.
- How the remote academy will monitor enrollment, course credit accrual, progress toward graduation, and course completion.
- Hardware, software, and other infrastructure that supports online learning.
- The minimum amount of synchronous instruction time required to complete a course, including the time each student must spend in synchronous instruction with a licensed teacher to complete a course.
- The professional development that will be provided to those teaching in the remote academy related to the pedagogy of providing remote instruction.
- The method by which student proficiency in a course will be tested or measured.
- How the remote academy will meet requirements for physical education under the laws of the State.
- The method by which the remote academy will communicate student progress with parents, including providing for in-person meetings at the discretion of the principal of the remote academy.
- The method for determining location for, safety precautions during, and personnel at an in-person meeting if the remote academy plans to offer optional in person meetings.

The SBE must approve plans that meet the established requirements. A remote academy must be approved for a period of 5 school years and can be renewed for additional 5 year terms upon resubmission of an application. The SBE may revoke approval of a remote academy at any time on the basis of substantial noncompliance of the requirements or of the approved plan.

Evaluations and Rule-Making: The SBE must evaluate the success of remote academies by looking at school performance scores and grades, retention rates, attendance rates, and for grades 9-12, high school completion and dropout rates. The SBE must report by November 15 of each year to the Joint Legislative Education Oversight Committee on the evaluation of these schools and on any recommended statutory changes. The first evaluation report shall be made by November 15, 2022. The SBE must adopt emergency rules for remote academies for the 2021-2022 school year.

SECTION 4: LEAs that have assigned school codes by May 1, 2021 to operate schools with virtual instruction as the primary means of instruction can continue to operate those schools with virtual instruction as the primary means of instruction to satisfy the minimum instructional time requirements for the 2021-2022 school year.

SECTION 5: A charter school can provide blended learning with virtual instruction during the 2021-2022 school year if the Office of Charter Schools, by September 1, 2021, has approved a curriculum amendment allowing for the blended learning for that school.

EFFECTIVE DATE: The bill would be effective when it becomes law and applies beginning with the 2021-2022 school year.