

Proposed Changes to the Online Approval Process School Year 2026–27

Overview

The Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) will collect feedback on the proposed changes to conditions for approval, assurances, and application forms for online school programs from October 1 to October 31, 2026. **OSPI will review and update this process each year**, in alignment with the agency's commitment to continuous improvement and rigorous, learner-centered options in every community.

This document is designed to align with the academic calendar. It includes changes that are already in place for the 2026–27 school year as well as proposed changes that will not take effect until **January 1, 2027**. Information specific to the proposed changes has been bold and italicized below.

Clarifying Definitions

OSPI continues to explore ways to clarify definitions from [RCW 28A.250.010](#) and [WAC 392-502-010](#). Below are simplified definitions which may continue to evolve to support greater clarity.

- **Online School Program:** An OSPI-approved, online program of basic education that delivers online learning to part-time or full-time enrolled students. Online school programs can only be operated by Local Education Agencies (LEAs) in Washington State.
 - **Multidistrict Program:** Serves resident students and allows for over 10% non-resident students, with or without an affiliate partnership.
 - **Single District Program:** Serves resident students and fewer than 10% non-resident students, with or without an affiliate partnership.
 - **Alternative Learning Experience (ALE) Online School Program:** An online school program that is approved to operate under a board approved ALE program. Instructional time for students takes place fully or partially away from the classroom.
 - **Non-ALE Online School Program:** An online school program where instructional time takes place 100% in person. In-person instruction is when instructional activity is planned and delivered under the supervision of school district staff and on school grounds ([WAC 392-401-012\(2\)](#)). To consider this a course of study, the instruction should be delivered under the supervision of a certificated teacher with attendance taken ([WAC 392-121-107](#)).
- **Degree of Contracted Services:** The extent of services provided by an approved online course provider via contract. This can include courses, teaching, and/or administration oversight. The greater the degree of contracted services, the higher risk to district oversight, monitoring, and governance.



- **Continued Approval:** The conditions that must be met to maintain approval status.
- **Course Certification:** Courses approved through OSPI in collaboration with third-party reviewer Quality Matters (QM). Online course providers are responsible for ensuring courses are certified and for maintaining course certification. LEAs contracting with course providers must also verify course certification. Courses that are not certified must be approved pursuant to school board policies adopted in accordance with [RCW 28A.320.230](#).
- **Online Course Provider:** Any public or private organization wishing to sell instructional materials (organized by content area and/or grade-level/grade band) **and** contracted instruction to LEAs, schools, and/or students. Instruction provided under contract includes other agreements such as cooperative agreements, memorandums of understanding, or any other arrangements that involve the transfer of dollars in exchange for instructional materials or instruction and is subject to [WAC 392-121-188](#).
- **Course Provider Readiness:** The extent to which a course provider has established systems, documentation, and course quality necessary to successfully participate in third-party review and demonstrate readiness for approval.

Proposed Changes

Online School Program Applications

- Applications will be reviewed with a lens of “risk” as determined by:
 - Probability of student remote vs. in-person instruction
 - ALE-online school program (higher level of risk)
 - Non-ALE online school program (lower risk) degree of contracted service
 - No contracted services (lowest risk)
 - Courses only (low risk)
 - Courses and teachers (medium risk)
 - Courses, teachers, and administrators (highest risk)
- ALE-Online Program Applications:
 - For ALE programs that wish to offer online school programs, a board approved ALE program must be in place prior to applying for online school program approval.

Online School Program Timeline

Beginning January 1, 2027, OSPI will implement two annual approval windows, a primary window, and a secondary window. In addition to these windows, off-cycle requests for single district online school program approval will be processed as capacity allows.

Primary Approval Window

The purpose of this window is **to process the majority of LEA requests** for online school programs in preparation for the following school year.

- September–October: **Application window**
- November–December: **Intake Meetings**
- January 31: **Governance Plan Due**
- February–March: **Implementation Interviews**
- April–May 15: **Approvals**

Secondary Approval Window

The purpose of this window is **to process late start programs or modifications** to existing programs.

- January–February: **Application window**
- March–April: **Intake Meetings**
- May 31: **Governance Plan Due**
- June–July: **Implementation interviews**
- August 31: **Approvals**

Online School Program Approval Windows

Month	Primary Window	Secondary Window
September	Application	Not Applicable
October	Application	Not Applicable
November	Intake Meetings	Not Applicable
December	Intake Meetings	Not Applicable
January	Governance Plan Due	Application
February	Implementation Interviews	Application
March	Implementation Interviews	Intake Meetings
April	Approvals	Intake Meetings
May	Approvals	Governance Plan Due
June	Not Applicable	Implementation Interviews
July	Not Applicable	Implementation Interviews
August	Not Applicable	Approvals

Online School Program Approval

- Online school program approval will be disaggregated by ALE-online vs non-ALE online. The intent of this proposed change is to:
 - Reaffirm that online courses are an ALE course type,
 - Increase transparency when reporting to local school boards, and
 - Require program name alignment across reporting and information systems.
- Online School Programs will be placed in cohorts based on their initial approval date.
- New program cohorts will be expected to participate in training and professional development as a condition of continued approval.

Online School Program Renewal

- Many online school programs are past their renewal periods. From January–March 2027, these programs will be given notice of their anticipated renewal period. Due to the volume of existing online school programs, OSPI will take a staggered approach to implementing program renewals that are based on initial approval dates. Note: LEAs can choose to renew sooner, if desired.

Online Course Providers

Note: This does not apply to online school programs who do not have approval to operate as online course providers.

- QM will begin conducting course provider readiness assessments.
- Course Providers will be categorized within three levels of readiness:
 - **Review Ready:** Course providers have previously engaged in a third-party review process and have provided evidence of systems, documentation, and course quality necessary to successfully participate in the course-approval process.
 - **Not-Yet Review Ready:** Course providers have not previously engaged in a third-party review and need additional support to be successful.
 - **Washington LEA Course Providers: Approved online course providers that are also public-school districts.** To reduce administrative burden, this group will be expected to go through a simplified process that leverages evidence collected in existing state facilitated processes (e.g., program review and support and/or state audits).
- **Review Ready Course Providers:**
 - Must have 15% of courses available for purchase certified by December 15, 2027, with a minimum of 5% certified by May 31, 2027.
 - **Recommended:** K–12 National Standards for Quality Online Learning Aligned (NSQ-Aligned) Teaching Online Certificate (TOC) training for 5% of teachers.
- **Not-Yet Review Ready Providers:**
 - Those that are responsible for oversight and quality assurance of the course development process must complete the “Applying the QM K–12 Rubric” course by March 31, 2027, to support the intentional preparation of courses for review.
 - Must have 10% of courses available for purchase certified by December 15, 2027, with a minimum of 5% certified by August 31, 2027.
 - **Recommended:** K–12 NSQ-Aligned TOC training for 5% of teachers.
- **Washington LEA Course Providers:**
 - Those that are responsible for oversight and quality assurance of the course development process must complete the “Applying the QM K–12 Rubric” course by March 31, 2027, to support the intentional preparation of courses for review.
 - Have course provider administrators complete the K–12 NSQ-Aligned TOC training.

- Must have 10% of courses available for purchase (beginning with LEA-developed courses) certified by December 15, 2027, with a minimum of 5% certified by August 31, 2027.
- **New to Washington Course Providers** will submit a letter of intent to QM, along with one to three letters of endorsement from Washington State LEAs.
- **Course-Level Approval:** Although QM will be awarding course certifications, course-level approval is not a new process. It is important for LEAs to run all non-certified courses through their local materials adoption process.