

Frequently Asked Questions

Charter School Operations in Response to COVID-19

These are extraordinary times, as our schools are dealing with the devastation and closures arising from the tornadoes and COVID-19. TDOE has prepared this FAQ to address some of the most pressing issues raised by our charter schools.

1. Will our schools continue to receive BEP funding, and if so, how will it be calculated?

As a result of the BEP formula being based on prior year data, no school will experience any changes to its BEP payments for this year, including for ADMs and transportation. Current year payments are based on input data from FY19. All remaining BEP payments will continue to be issued on the expected timeline and in alignment with the BEP allocations provided for FY20. The most recent payment was issued on March 13, and the next payment is scheduled for April 15. For districts earning additional BEP Growth payments for increased student enrollment in the current year, the department will continue to assess these counts under current business rules (covering periods 2, 3, 6, and 7 of the current year). Should unexpected closures alter these periods in anyway, the department will work with the necessary oversight bodies to address the issue and adjust the calculation's inputs as appropriate.

2. How can we feed our students during the school closures?

Please refer to <https://www.tn.gov/education/health-and-safety/update-on-coronavirus.html> for nutrition guidance, updates and toolkits. In addition, TDOE has partnered with Hoonuit to make available a school meal site finder, SchoolMealFinder.com, for Tennessee families to find the closest meal pick up program available to them.

3. What responsibility do we have for assessments and accountability?

There will be no mandated state testing this year for any assessments. Similarly, there will be no accountability grading this year. The FY19 accountability scores will remain on the TDOE website. Both the Federal and State governments have approved assessment and accountability waivers for FY20 only.

4. How are we supposed to continue instruction for our students?

The School Closure Toolkit: Academics and Instruction provided at <https://www.tn.gov/education/health-and-safety/update-on-coronavirus.html> contains useful guidance and resources. In addition, TDOE will be posting a continuity of instruction toolkit on the site; however, no school is required to use any particular toolkit.

Digital copies of textbooks, reference materials, assignments, and audio-visual learning supports are available via online learning platforms and web sites (e.g., school websites, or open source sites). Other options include:

- Teachers and education assistants can prepare packets of materials for students. Packets may

include photocopied textbook pages, worksheets, calendar/schedule of work to be completed, directions for homework, projects, or written assignments. These packets can be mailed or delivered to students.

- Teachers can record the lesson (audio or video) and share it with students through website, social media, public access television, etc. Districts can also use their school website to host or provide information.
- Teachers can host telephone calls for individual students or groups of students to provide instruction or provide students to ask questions on the provided materials.
- District “robo-call” functionality could be utilized to share assignments with groups of students with appropriate teacher follow up.

The Office of School Models and Programs is seeking flexibility from the federal government regarding the use of CSP funds to provide for continuity of instruction and collaboration for charter schools. You can view this request at the bottom of the website: <https://www.tn.gov/education/health-and-safety/update-on-coronavirus.html>. Potential examples of permissible expenses under these revised criteria could include: technology to be deployed directly to students, supplemental consumable curricular resources, software platforms that would allow for distance learning, supplies associated with preparation of instructional materials, virtual learning platforms serving students across multiple charter schools, shared curricular resources, or cross-utilized staff across schools. We will be issuing a grant application to charter schools the week of March 23 to expedite the use of CSP funds for these purposes.

5. Have the deadlines for submitting new charter applications or charter renewals been extended?

The April 1 deadline for submission of new charter applications and charter renewal applications to LEAs is explicitly specified in Tennessee statute (T.C.A. § 49-13-107 and § 49-13-121, respectively). Tennessee State Board of Education Chapter 0520-14-02-.01(3) precludes the Commissioner from considering waivers of specific requirements outlined in the charter school statute. While we are seeking an adjustment to these deadlines from the government, LEAs retain the authority to adjust their internal timelines and protocols to ensure applications are submitted and considered in a thorough and thoughtful manner. Our intent is to be as flexible as possible while continuing to comply with applicable law. The specific statutory requirements are set forth below:

New Charter Applications

Under T.C.A. § 49-13-108, an LEA must approve or deny a new charter application within 90 days of its receipt. The failure to make any determination within that timeframe will be deemed an approval of the application. If an application is denied, the sponsor has 30 days following its receipt from the LEA of the written grounds for denial in which to file an amended application. The LEA has 60 days following its receipt of the amended application to approve or deny it, and the failure to do so will be deemed an approval.

Renewals

Under T.C.A. § 49-13-121, LEA processes for charter renewal application consideration must conclude with an official ruling no later than February 1 of the following year.

6. Will our CSP funding be impacted? Will CSP funding be available for new charter schools that are opening in FY21?

Your current CSP funding will not be affected. You should continue to submit reimbursement requests for allocated funds via ePlan. The Office of School Models and Programs has submitted a request to the U.S. Department of Education to allow more flexibility about the timing and usage of our CSP funds in light of both the devastation caused by the tornadoes and the school closures due to COVID-19. You can view this request at the bottom of the website: <https://www.tn.gov/education/health-and-safety/update-on-coronavirus.html>. We are hoping for a quick turnaround on the federal response.

7. Is there any new funding available to assist during this crisis? TDOE has funding that is now available for distribution. Our plan is to administer a new CSP grant that would provide planning and implementation funds for new charter schools as well as funds for continuity of instruction and collaboration for all charter schools. We will be issuing a grant application to charter schools the week of March 23 to address these dual purposes.

8. What other resources are available for my school?

Your key resource is the link to the Coronavirus Update on the TDOE's website located at: <https://www.tn.gov/education/health-and-safety/update-on-coronavirus.html>. This website will be continually updated as we obtain more information from Federal and other authorities and develop additional toolkits for your use.