

ARCHIVE: COVID-19 Superintendent Call

March 13, 2020

The following are questions asked by directors during one-on-one outreach prior to the call and during the call and the answers provided by the department. For additional guidance and up-to-the-minute supports, please check the TDOE website for more information.

Academics

- What guidance exists on the compliance needs for distance learning (such as counting those as in session days, taking/validating attendance, etc.)?
 - **RESPONSE:** The Department will provide guidance on the important considerations that districts should consider when creating a Continuing Instructional Plan using distance learning. That guidance will list all the things that should be considered from delivery models to availability of technology and how to track attendance.

Assessment and Accountability

- Who has the authority to waive chronic absenteeism as a component of the accountability determinations and/or not use testing this year?
 - **RESPONSE:** Chronic absenteeism is not within the Commissioner's waiver ability. Therefore, the Department will seek guidance from the General Assembly and the US Department of Education.
- Given COVID 19, seasonal flu, flooding, tornado, and snow- what changes in accountability is the Department considering?
 - **RESPONSE:** TDOE has submitted a waiver to the US Department of Education to remove all accountability related requirements for one year.
- Will there be an extension to completing WIDA and other assessments?
 - **RESPONSE:** TDOE will not be administering any required assessments for the 19-20 school year, including TCAP, MSAA, TCAP-Alt, WIDA, or EOC tests. The Department has submitted a waiver to the US Department of Education to remove all assessment-related requirements for one year, and the state legislature has provided similar relief by waiving state statute. Please see the [Assessment and Accountability FAQ](#) on the Department's website for more detailed information.

Communications

- When should districts expect guidance online?
 - **RESPONSE:** School Closure Guidance, School Nutrition Services guidance and information related to continuing instruction was sent out on March 13.
- Will any state meetings, events, and activities be cancelled? If they are cancelled, will reimbursements be made?
 - **RESPONSE:** The Department is reviewing CDC guidance as it relates to large gatherings and will be assessing events on a case by case basis. Information about events will be sent directly to event participants. Please refer to the [Meeting and Event Updates](#) on the Department's website and email the listed contact for more information.
- How many cases of COVID-19 have been diagnosed in Tennessee?
 - **RESPONSE:** This number is continuously updated on the TN.gov website.

Funding

- What fiscal impact on disbursement or reimbursement of funding should a school district expect?
 - **RESPONSE:** BEP payments will continue on schedule and there will be no change or impact on the amount. Federal reimbursements will continue to occur through ePlan. As long as districts submit the appropriate request through ePlan, those requests will continue to go out.
- Will this impact the CSP reimbursement cycle?
 - **RESPONSE:** No. If there is a prescheduled or preplanned break or vacation, that is still a break or vacation. This is only for days where a child otherwise be enrolled and active in school.

Legal Requirements or Needs

- Can you provide an update on chronic absenteeism as a component of accountability and funding for this year?
 - **RESPONSE:** The Department has submitted a waiver to the US Department of Education to remove all accountability related requirements for one year. For federal funding tied to accountability, the Department will seek to extend support found under current federal school designations.

- Will there be an extension for Portfolios or are they still due May 1? How does this impact teacher evaluation process, and the portfolio model for kindergarten?
 - **RESPONSE:** This will still be due May 1, but the Department will provide further updates soon.
- Where is the stockpiled use form?
 - **RESPONSE:** Please find the following under Request Forms on our website: [Request for Use of Stockpiled Days](#) and [Stockpiled Days and Waiver Forms FAQ](#).

Nutrition

- Concerning meals, if districts provide a drive-thru option, are students required to be in the car?
 - **RESPONSE:** The Department will provide specific guidance on school meal programs on its website.
- What financial assistance will be given to nutrition departments?
 - **RESPONSE:** The Department has offered a waiver to allow for meals to be prepared in the event of unexpected closures. The Department has also offered a waiver that waives the requirement that children need to congregate at the school to receive meals and must eat the meal there.

Safety and Operations

- If districts do not close schools but parents elect to keep students at home, should districts excuse them?
 - **RESPONSE:** For additional guidance and up-to-the-minute supports, please check the TDOE website for more information.
- Can you provide an update as to the possibility of a mandated statewide closure?
 - **RESPONSE:** As soon as the Department has more information, guidance will be sent. However, districts are encouraged to listen to elected officials for further guidance on school closures.

Special Populations

- What guidance is available for serving the ESL/ELL population and providing required documentation?
 - **RESPONSE:** Please see the following guidance documents on the Department's website: [Suggestions for ESL Classes and Activities](#) and [School Closure Toolkit: Special Populations](#).

- Can you speak to the Department’s communications with the US Department of Education related to legal compliance, particularly as it relates to special populations?
 - **RESPONSE:** The Department will be issuing very specific guidance around special education services. If the school is completely closed and you are providing no services to the general education population, you do not need to provide services to special education populations. If there is a Continuing Instructional Plan in place, you do need to provide services to special education populations. The Department is continuing to work with the US Department of Education to align guidance.
- The March 2020 USDOE guidance Q&A describes in the answer to Question A-1 that references FAPE that districts “must ensure, to the greatest extent possible,” the services in a student’s IEP. Is the Department’s interpretation of this language that this is a change from the existing regulations to address the current situation, or is it simply a restatement of the existing law with no change to address the current situation?
 - **RESPONSE:** The Department has reviewed USDOE guidance and bases its guidance on that document. That phrase implies that districts will do their absolute best to ensure that students with disabilities continue to receive services under the IEP while acknowledging that, given the current environment, that might not be as feasible.