



September 3, 2021

Dear Director Thomas,

Thank you for your waiver submission on September 3, 2021.

The commissioner of education may consider waivers related to of the provisions of Tenn. Comp. R. & Regs. Chapters 0520-01-03 and 0520-01-13 related to remote instruction to the extent necessary to allow students affected at the classroom or school level by COVID-19 isolation or quarantine to participate in remote instruction. As stated, your district still has the authority to quarantine students and staff on an individual case-by-case basis (not in the aggregate). Waivers will only be considered when a LEA can document and demonstrate a significant impact of COVID-19 quarantine or isolation on school operations, impacting students, teachers, and/or staff. Please note, if a waiver request is granted to a school, all extracurricular activities for that school must also be cancelled for the duration of the waiver period.

The waiver submitted by Knox County for 2 schools is **approved** at this time.

The rationale for this approval is:

- The significant number of student and staff absences.
- The unknown number of students in quarantine.
- The challenges you named and are working to address with your metro health department

The department has received a significant number of parent concerns related to mitigation strategies determined at the local level. If not already in place, the department continues to encourage all districts to implement as many mitigation strategies as possible to contain the spread of COVID-19, limit quarantines, and remain in-person, such as utilizing:

- The same or enhanced mitigation strategies used last school year such as temperature checks, physical distancing, frequent handwashing, etc.
- Seating charts in all settings, including classrooms, cafeteria/meals, bus routes, etc.
- Proactively stocking non-perishable items for breakfasts/lunches to account for meal staff absences
- Cohorting students to limit close contacts
- The consideration of masking

I continue to be incredibly grateful for the work of your district, educators, students and families as we collectively address and respond to COVID-19.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'P. Schwinn'.

Penny Schwinn, PhD, MAT

Commissioner, Tennessee Department of Education

Local Education Agency Waiver Request Application: COVID-19 Relief

Upon application by the local education agency (LEA) for one (1) or more of its classrooms or schools, pursuant to Tenn. Code Ann. § 49-1-209 (d), the commissioner of education will consider waivers of the provisions of Tenn. Comp. R. & Regs. Chapters 0520-01-03 and 0520-01-13 related to remote instruction to the extent necessary to allow students affected at the classroom or school level by COVID-19 isolation or quarantine to participate in remote instruction. This waiver process is not required for individual students on quarantine.

Waivers will only be considered when a LEA can document and demonstrate a significant impact of COVID-19 quarantine or isolation on school operations, impacting students, teachers, and/or staff. Please note, if a waiver request is granted to a school, all extracurricular activities for that school must also be cancelled.

Please submit completed applications to Commissioner.Schwinn@tn.gov. Following review by the commissioner or designee, the local education agency will be notified in writing if the waiver request application is approved or denied. If approved, the waiver will only be valid for seven (7) calendar days. If conditions warranting a waiver persist, then the LEA may submit additional waivers.

Knox County Schools

Local Education Agency

912 S. Gay Street Knoxville 37923

Street City Zip



Sept. 3, 2021

Director of Schools (Signature)

Date

1. Number of **classrooms** for which you are requesting a waiver: _____

Grade of Classroom	Name of School	In Quarantine or Isolation					
		# of Teachers	% of Teachers	# of Staff	% of Staff	# of Students	% of Students

Please explain why this waiver is necessary and in-person instruction is not feasible at this time:

2. Number of **schools** for which you are requesting a waiver: 2

Name of School	In Quarantine or Isolation					
	# of Teachers	% of Teachers	# of Staff	% of Staff	# of Students	% of Students
Austin-East Magnet High School			22	22%	153	23%
Central High School			25	20%	375	28%

Please explain why this waiver is necessary and in-person instruction is not feasible at this time:

Knox County Schools is requesting a waiver for Austin-East Magnet High School and Central High School. Of the district's 88 schools, these two schools have consistently seen the highest number of absences for students and staff, with a minimal sub fill rate.

Of the total number of absences at Austin-East, 18 students and 3 staff are in isolation. Last week, student absences averaged more than 160. This week, Austin-East had the following student absences: Monday – 223, Tuesday – 176, Wednesday – 149, Thursday – 135 and Friday – 183.

Of the total number of absences at Central, 40 students and 4 staff are in isolation. Last week, student absences averaged more than 300. This week, Central had the following student absences: Monday – 393, Tuesday – 364, Wednesday – 341, Thursday – 344 and Friday – 376.

Of the 22 staff who are absent at Austin-East, 21 positions are unfilled. Of the 31 staff who are absent at Central, 26 positions are unfilled. Teachers are covering as many classes as possible on their planning period, administrators are supporting, and multiple classes are being combined in the library, auditorium, and gym to maintain some level of learning for our students. Additionally, Central Office staff has been deployed - away from their daily responsibilities - to help sub at these schools.

As we are continuing to work with the Knox County Health Department to improve processes, quarantine numbers are unavailable at this time.

Both schools are prepared for virtual instruction.