



STATE OF NEW JERSEY
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

Updates and Frequently Asked Questions Related to COVID-19 School Closures

Updated: March 17, 2020

This guidance will be updated regularly during COVID-19 school closures.

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2019 Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) Related Updates: New Content

The New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE) is providing the following information below to assist districts as they continue school-based operations during the duration of COVID-19 related school closures. Additional questions should be directed to NCOV@doh.nj.gov.

Effective March 17, 2020:

Food Service (see page nine for more information):

- In consultation with the New Jersey Department of Agriculture (NJDA), NJDOE notified all districts and charter schools that believe they have one School Funding Authority (SFA) eligible for the federal summer meals programs to apply immediately.

Assessments (see page ten for more information):

- On March 12, 2020, the United States Department of Education (ED) issued guidance encouraging states to, as an initial measure, adjust testing windows and indicated that there will be flexibility with various federally required assessments for schools impacted by extraordinary circumstances due to COVID-19.
- The National Center for Education Statistics has suspended administration of the National Assessment of Educational Progress Long-Term Trend (NAEP LTT) Assessment for the remainder of the 2019-2020 school year. Testing will resume in January 2021. Thank you to participating districts.
- Due to COVID-19 school closures, ACCESS for ELLs administration has been interrupted. The Department is working with the US Department of Education on guidance regarding this year's administration.
- The Dynamic Learning Maps (DLM) administration will not start on April 1, 2020, as was previously reported, and updated schedules and policies will be forthcoming.

General Information for School Closures

1. **Question:** Can the NJDOE please provide guidance regarding how attendance will be captured if schools were to close due to COVID-19?

Answer:

As relayed in the March 13, 2020 NJDOE Memo, [Guidance Regarding Requirements for Public Health-Related School Closure](#), “[a]ny day on which all students impacted by a public health-related closure have access to home instruction services provided consistent with the guidance in this memo will count as a day on which the board of education has provided public school facilities toward its compliance with the 180-day requirement in accordance with *N.J.S.A. 18A:7F-9*.” Because such instruction is being provided, all students can be recorded as present for applicable days unless the district knowingly determines a student was not participating in any such instruction during health-related school closures

Additionally, the U.S. Department of Education recently released a [fact sheet regarding the Impact of COVID-19 on Assessments and Accountability under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act](#). As additional federal guidance becomes available, the NJDOE will continue to provide schools and districts with any updated information.

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2. **Question:** Districts are concerned that implementing precautionary school closures might put the district at risk of falling out of compliance with the requirement to provide school facilities for at least 180 days (*N.J.S.A. 18A:7F-9*). Has the NJDOE offered any flexibility regarding how districts can meet that 180-day requirement in the event of a school closure?

Answer:

Yes. Please see the March 13, 2020 NJDOE Memo, [Guidance Regarding Requirements for Public Health-Related School Closure](#).

We encourage districts to consult their county offices of education regarding any questions or concerns surrounding the development and implementation of the school health-related preparedness plans referenced in that guidance.

3. (Updated) Question: What students must receive instruction?

Answer:

All students served by the district must be addressed in the plan, including students in preschool if the district has state funded preschool and/or if the district services preschoolers with disabilities. The plans developed must include age-appropriate strategies and materials to meet the needs of all students. Districts offering preschool should remember to include contracted providers—private preschool providers and Head Start providers—in their planning activities. Each district plan must also include developmentally appropriate strategies and materials to meet the needs of all students with disabilities including those educated in out-of-district placements. Districts are encouraged to consult with the school in which the student is placed to provide continuity of instruction to the maximum extent practicable.

For further information, please refer to the [Questions and Answers on Providing Services to Children with Disabilities During the Coronavirus Disease 2019 Outbreak](#).

4. (New) Question: What is the NJDOE’s guidance regarding the provision of Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) equitable services for nonpublic school students if school buildings close and students receive online or virtual instruction?

Answer:

Per the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) sections 1117(a)(1)(A) and 8501(a)(1), a public school district (LEA) must provide services that meet the needs of students and teachers. In the case of a nonpublic school closing due to COVID-19, the nonpublic school administrator should immediately consult with the LEA that is the steward of the funds. It is the LEA’s responsibility to ensure that nonpublic equitable services are provided. The provision of virtual services should be leveraged in direct consultation between the LEA and nonpublic school officials.

5. Question: How might a district be able to administer home instruction remotely if families in our community do not have a device or internet connectivity?

Answer:

Equitable access to learning is a critical consideration for any plan and will require that a district understands the limitations each student faces. Districts should consider collecting information on which students have access to a device, how that device is or is not shared, and what access each student has to a network. Schools and districts should take care to collect this information in a manner that avoids stigmatization of any students with varying degrees of access to technology and internet service at home.

Instructional strategies should be varied and designed to meet the needs of the students. Districts should consider various solutions, such as utilizing partnerships with local community-based organizations and businesses, developing worksheets for instruction, or uploading of lessons electronically.

Accommodations and multiple means of conducting assignments should be considered for students with disabilities. If students with disabilities do not have access to internet connectivity to participate in remote or online home instruction, the IEP team will need to determine what compensatory instruction a student may require when their school district reopens.

6. Question: In the face of a pandemic, issues will emerge that are beyond the practical operation of a school district. Does the NJDOE have any advice for the situation in which education becomes less of a priority for people?

Answer:

The NJDOE understands districts will need to exhibit flexibility, that the plan may need to be updated as the situation changes, and that the NJDOE will need to provide individualized support to districts on a case-by-case basis.

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7. **(New) Question:** In the event of a school closure, are there any non-teaching personnel that may be deemed essential and required to perform certain duties?

Answer:

When developing and updating its emergency preparedness plan, each district will need to consider their specific circumstances to determine which personnel would be considered essential and need to perform some duties during a closure. It is likely that certain staff would be needed in most districts, such as the chief school administrator, to oversee and coordinate operations; the school business administrator, to maintain business office operations; information technology staff, to assist staff using remote access and to implement any online instruction; staff involved in the preparation or delivery of food; and custodial and maintenance staff, to provide access to district facilities, and to clean and sanitize buildings as needed.

Special Education

1. **Question:** How should students with disabilities, including students in special class programs, medically fragile students, students with one-to-one paraprofessionals, and students receiving related services, be accommodated in the plan?

Answer:

Home instruction/services shall be consistent with the student's Individualized Education Plan Program (IEP) to the most appropriate extent possible. Districts should talk to parents, who are key members of the IEP team, and help them consider how they may best ensure that students with disabilities have the necessary supports, including medical supports, in place during a public health-related school closure. Consultation with the parents should explore how students with disabilities will gain equitable access to home instruction.

This is a temporary situation, and districts must offer special education services to the most appropriate extent possible while students are away from their schools/programs. IEP teams may need to consider compensatory services when students return to school and IEPs may need to be adjusted accordingly. The IEP team should determine the amount of compensatory related services students with IEPs may require, on a case-by-case basis, when school resumes.

For further information, please refer to the [Questions and Answers on Providing Services to Children with Disabilities During the Coronavirus Disease 2019 Outbreak](#).

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- 2. Question:** Who is responsible for ensuring services are provided to students with disabilities attending schools outside of the district?
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Answer:

Each district should update contact information for every out-of-district placement where one or more of their students with disabilities attends and maintain regular communication during school closures. This includes in-state and out-of-state approved private schools for students with disabilities, county educational services commissions, jointure commissions, special services school districts, Naples placements, regional day schools, the Marie H. Katzenbach School for the Deaf and other school districts.

It is the responsibility of the sending district to ensure students with disabilities attending out-of-district placements are provided with instruction during school closures consistent with the student's IEP to the greatest extent possible. Districts are encouraged to consult with the student's school of attendance regarding the nature and delivery of instruction.

Students in out-of-state residential schools may remain in those placements; however, if they will come home during the time of the closure, the local health agency should be contacted for guidance regarding their return to school. Decisions regarding attendance for students educated outside of the district should be made on an individual district basis. If an out-of-district placement remains open while a student's resident district is required to close, and it is determined that the student will not attend school, the home instruction guidance to the resident district applies to that student if he or she does not attend school. The provision of home instruction should be determined in consultation with the receiving school. Ultimately, it is the sending district's responsibility to ensure home instruction is provided.

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- 3. (New) Question:** How should school districts provide auxiliary and remedial services (chapters 192 and 193) to students enrolled in nonpublic schools?
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Answer:

Districts should consult with their contracted service providers and their nonpublic schools in developing a plan to provide services to students consistent with each student's individual service plan.

Food Service

1. **(New) Question:** How should districts provide meals to students who receive free and reduced lunch during a closure?

Answer:

All boards of education must develop a school health-related closure preparedness plan to provide home instruction in the event of such a closure. Each preparedness plan should address the provision of school nutrition benefits or services for eligible students. Districts can review the [NJDOE Checklist for Emergency Preparedness Plans](#) on the NJDOE website to better understand what must be included. The preparedness plans should be submitted to the appropriate Executive County Superintendent.

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2. **(Updated) Question:** How should districts work to ensure they are reimbursed for feeding eligible students during this health-related closure?

Answer:

On March 11, 2020, the United States Department of Agriculture granted the New Jersey Department of Agriculture's (NJDA) request to waive the requirements typically associated with the Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) and Seamless Summer Option (SSO) to allow schools to provide meals to eligible students during the period of school closure due to the Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19). Specifically, NJDA is permitted to allow schools enrolled in the SFSP or SSO to provide meals to eligible students in non-congregate settings, as well as create a shortened application process for eligible districts not currently enrolled in SSO.

In consultation with NJDA, NJDOE is directing any district that has at least one eligible school to apply as soon as possible for inclusion in the federal summer meals program. Once those districts are eligible School Funding Authorities, they will be eligible to receive federal reimbursement for providing meals to all free and reduced lunch students throughout the district at any school site.

SFAs in good standing have two options for reimbursement, under the SFSP or the SSO Program, should they close or institute remote instruction due to the Coronavirus:

1. SFAs approved to participate in the 2019 Summer Food Service Program can claim reimbursement for meals served according to all SFSP regulations. Form #199 will be emailed to approved SFSP participants. Approved SFAs should complete and e-mail Form #199, Waiver to Serve Meals during a COVID-19 related closure, to snpspecialprojects@ag.nj.gov as soon as possible, for approval to serve meals due to a COVID-19 related closure.

2. SFAs with at least one school site serving a minimum of 50% or more free and reduced-price eligible students can apply to the SSO through the School Nutrition Electronic Application and Reimbursement System (SNEARS). Once approved, all students served will be claimed at the “free” eligibility classification. In order to apply, click on the “Seamless Summer Option” link on the home page of SNEARS.

This link is now active as of Monday, March 16, 2020 at 8 a.m. The SSO program has a more streamlined application process and districts should consider applying for that program first. A quick turnaround time for approval is expected. SFAs serving meals through the SFSP and SSO must continue to follow all counting, claiming, and meal pattern guidelines. Up to two meals may be claimed per child per day. The Division of Food and Nutrition acknowledges that many SFAs do not qualify to participate in either SSO or SFSP because they have less than 50% free and reduced-price eligible students. To that end, an additional waiver has been submitted to the USDA requesting to allow these SFAs to continue providing meals through the National School Lunch Program. This waiver request is under review. The Division of Food and Nutrition will maintain communication and provide guidance as received.

Additional information for districts is available on our [NJDOE website](#). Questions may be directed to the New Jersey Department of Agriculture, Division of Food and Nutrition at 609-984-0692.

School districts that plan to participate in these meal provision programs should continue to make appropriate plans and prepare for meal service during school closures. Information and resources regarding such plans and preparations can be found on the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\) website](#) and by contacting county offices of education.

Assessments

1. **(Updated) Question:** How do COVID-19-related school closures affect statewide testing for school year 2019-20?

Answer:

The NJDOE is communicating with the United States Department of Education (ED), other states in similar situations and school districts to develop guidance for long-term testing interruptions. We are currently evaluating all flexibilities and potential schedule changes and will provide guidance as school reopening dates are confirmed. For further information please refer to US Department of Education’s [Fact Sheet: Impact of COVID-19 on Assessments and Accountability under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act](#).

2. **(New) Question:** How will the NJDOE support districts and schools in meeting their requirements to administer New Jersey Student Learning Assessment (NJSLA) Portfolio Appeals?

Answer:

Portfolio appeals will continue to be reviewed on an ongoing basis. The NJDOE will extend the submission deadline of May 8, 2020, which is the district submission deadline to ensure the NJDOE will issue an approval in time for student participation in graduation ceremonies. The NJDOE is developing a process to electronically submit portfolio appeals and will provide additional information as soon as possible.

3. **(New) Question:** How can students, who must participate in the Portfolio Appeals process, meet their graduation assessment requirement if schools are closed?

Answer:

The NJDOE is encouraging districts and schools to develop a process to make Constructed Response Tasks (CRTs) available to students remotely. Some potential options include:

- Post CRTs on district/school website.
- Create a process and “drop box” for the electronic return to the district/school of completed CRTs.
- Students without access to the internet can have CRTs mailed to them, complete them at home, and bring them for submission when school reopens.

(New) Educator Preparation Programs (EPPs) and Certification

1. **Question:** How does the New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE) expect EPPs to handle short term (loss of less than one month of time) interruptions to clinical practice and experience due to districts closing in response to the outbreak of COVID-19?

Answer:

All approved Certificate of Eligibility with Advanced Standing (CEAS) programs are designed to meet clinical requirements set forth in *N.J.A.C. 6A:9A-4.4*. In short-term emergency situations, EPPs should prioritize the safety and wellness of their teacher candidates and have the discretion to adjust the schedule and make other accommodations to provide candidates an opportunity to meet clinical requirements.

2. Question: In the event of a long-term closure (greater than one month) how should EPPs address remaining clinical experience, clinical practice or internship hours?

Answer:

EPPs have the discretion to make necessary accommodations for candidates impacted by school closures. For example, candidates may complete the requirement in an alternative placement or procedures may be established for returning candidates to earn hours in the following semester. For candidates in their final semester of the program, EPPs also have the discretion to determine appropriate activities, assignments, and/or alternate (virtual/distant) placement necessary to satisfy the clinical component of the program.

3. Question: In the event a candidate's final clinical placement school closes long-term prior to edTPA submission, how should EPPs address program completion and recommendation for certification?

Answer:

All candidates are responsible for meeting certification requirements to be recommended by the EPP for licensure. The NJDOE is currently unable to waive this certification. Candidates unable to submit edTPA due to long-term placement school or university closures have the following options:

- Complete clinical practice virtually and utilize [edTPA's guidance for virtual classroom settings](#). Contact edTPA directly for additional questions and guidance; or
- The candidate may apply on their own for certification, in which case they will be issued a certificate of eligibility and a letter allowing them to teach but requiring them to pass edTPA and complete all other provisional requirements to earn their standard certification. If EPPs choose to exempt individual candidates from edTPA for program completion, given their specific extenuating circumstances, EPPs may not recommend the candidate for certification through the Online Teacher Licensing for Approved Programs (TLAP) application.

4. Question: In the event of a long-term institution closure, how will candidates complete the Physiology and Hygiene assessment for program completion and certification?

Answer:

At this time, the NJDOE is encouraging programs to provide an online assessment option and is in the process of developing a statewide online physiology and hygiene test and will keep providers updated about this option.

(New) Approved Private Schools for Students with Disabilities (APSSDs)

1. **Question:** How should APSSDs ensure the provision of services to students upon closure of all schools?

Answer:

APSSDs must remain in communication with their sending school districts during this time to determine how to meet the needs of their students in a manner that is consistent with the student's Individualized Education Program (IEP) and the Mandated Tuition Contract to the most appropriate extent possible. Those communications should be guided by the district's emergency preparedness plan and the provisions of this FAQ document. Instruction that is provided to students during school closure due to COVID-19 as part of the APSSD's documented discussion and agreement with the sending district will be considered allowable costs and each day that such agreed-upon services are available to students will count toward the 180-day requirement for APSSDs.

2. **Question:** How should APSSDs maintain business operations during this time?

Answer:

APSSDs should maintain business operations in a manner that will enable their independent auditor and the New Jersey Department of Education to ensure compliance with *N.J.A.C. 6A:14* and *6A:23A-18* to the maximum extent possible. This also means ensuring that APSSD staff maintains documentation of services provided to students and the duration, as well as, time worked by APSSD staff in the office or remotely.

3. **Question:** How should meals be provided to APSSD students during this time?

Answer:

APSSDs should work with the student's sending districts to ensure that students who need meals have access at the school district level.

4. **Question:** What should APSSDs do about one-to-one aides for students?

Answer:

The plan for provision of any related services to students in APSSDs should be discussed with and agreed to by the sending district.

(New) Board Operations

- 1. Question:** What options are available to boards of education to conduct business while minimizing the general public's exposure during this period?

Answer:

School boards will likely need to hold public meetings to conduct business on various matters, such as developing a budget for the upcoming school year. In accordance with the Open Public Meetings Act (OPMA), public meetings may be held in person or by means of communications equipment, including streaming services and other online meeting platforms. All meetings, including those held using communications equipment, must be noticed in a manner consistent with the requirement of the OPMA, unless the meeting is for emergent circumstances and held in a manner consistent with the requirements set forth at *N.J.S.A. 10:4-9(b)*. Boards of education should also provide guidance to the public for remotely accessing and providing comment at the meeting. Boards of education should still have an advertised meeting place, which, is connected to the meeting through communications equipment, unless otherwise directed by state or local emergency management or health officials, consistent with Executive Order 103 (Murphy 3/9/2020).

Boards of education are reminded that they are required to provide a means of public comment even if a meeting is held remotely. Further, if a board of education currently records the audio or video of its meetings, we recommend that it continue to record a remote meeting.

If a board of education that is meeting remotely requires an executive or closed session, the board must use a mechanism that ensures the confidentiality of closed session. To this end, after announcing the executive or closed session at the public portion of the meeting consistent with the OPMA, a board of education may consider using a separate, non-public, dial-in mechanism for the executive or closed portion of the meeting.

In preparation for upcoming meetings, boards of education are encouraged to coordinate with legal counsel and local offices of emergency management to ensure continued compliance with *N.J.S.A. 10:4-6* and other statutory obligations.

2. Question: What mechanisms are available to ensure that a school district’s business operations continue?

Answer:

There are several business office functions that would need to continue during a school closure, such as developing the FY 2021 budget, processing payroll, and procurement. In planning for an emergency closure, a school district should identify functions that may be completed remotely and perform any required steps to implement such remote access. If certain tasks can only be completed in a school district facility, then the district should make plans to ensure the necessary personnel have access to the building.