

COVID-19 Guidance and Answers to Common Questions

Information for school communities during the 2019-20 academic year will be updated on this page as it's made available - please check back frequently.

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***content most recently added/updated (week of June 22, 2020)**

Closed Schools

What schools are closed?

[All schools in Pennsylvania are closed until the end of their academic year.](#) This includes: public K-12 schools, brick and mortar and cyber charter schools, private and parochial schools, career and technical centers (CTCs), intermediate units (IUs); and childcare centers operating within any of the aforementioned; educational programming for students in non-educational placements such as residential settings (boarding schools), residential facilities, detention centers, and hospital settings; PA Pre-K Counts, Head Start Programs and Preschool Early Intervention programs; and Private Academic Nursery Schools and locally funded prekindergarten activities. Additionally, postsecondary institutions have suspended in-person instruction and non-essential services.

NOTE: Buildings may be opened as an exception for the purpose of serving as a polling place during the June 2 Pennsylvania primary election, if requested by the county election board. This includes preparing the site before and after the election day.

How should schools with residential programs modify their programs due to closure?

The Governor's directive closing all public and private schools extends to in-person educational programming for students in non-educational placements such as residential facilities, detention centers, and hospital settings. Such programs may choose to offer continuity of education that does not involve in-person instruction in accordance with applicable standards and requirements, as addressed in other provisions of this FAQ.

What is the closure date for postsecondary institutions that follow a variety of academic terms?

Consistent with the Governor's Order and call for social distancing, postsecondary institutions must suspend in-person instruction at least through the end of the spring 2020 term. Postsecondary institutions may not resume in-person instruction until the governor permits them to open or lifts the closure of non-life-sustaining businesses. Given that deliberations about state-level mitigation strategies are ongoing, students and institutions should be aware that the return to in-person instruction will be contingent on further developments surrounding the pandemic. It is not possible at this time to determine exactly when it will be safe to resume in-person instruction. [Access postsecondary education guidance, updates, and information on retrieving personal belongings, continuous operations, educational specialists, pass or fail grades, student loans, and more.](#)

May students return to school or college to return school-issued items/pick up their possessions?

Schools and postsecondary institutions do not need to seek approval from the Pennsylvania Department of Education to have students return to buildings to pick up belongings, return school-issued items, or to clear out their dorm rooms.

However, for the safety of students, staff, and families, schools and postsecondary institutions should implement a process that allows students to return school-issued items, or retrieve their belongings in a manner that prevents or mitigates the spread of COVID-19 and that employs social distancing measures, universal masking, and other applicable guidelines provided by the [Pennsylvania Department of Health](#) and the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#) [Opens In A New Window](#). Every effort should be taken to minimize opportunities for personal interaction. Students should contact their school for specific instructions on the process.

Staffing

How will state-level educator evaluation requirements be implemented for school year 2019-20?

During COVID-19 response efforts, school entities remain responsible for completing professional employee evaluations. Since student performance and building-level data will not be available for the 2019-20 school year, professional employees' evaluations will be based solely on observation and practice evidence, pursuant to Act 13 and the Secretary's authority.

NOTE: Act 13 contains other, non-emergency provisions that will lead to comprehensive updates to Pennsylvania's professional employee evaluation system; however, those changes will take effect in the 2021-22 school year.

Are school employees being paid during school closures?

Act 13 of 2020 provides a basis for fiscal stabilization for the education community and protects our educator workforce. Specifically, Section 1501.8 of the law addresses employee compensation for the 2019-20 school year as follows:

“Section (c)(1): (1) No employee of any school entity who was employed as of March 13, 2020, shall receive more or less compensation than the employee would otherwise have been entitled to receive from the school entity had the pandemic of 2020 not occurred, had the minimum instructional day requirement not been waived under subsection (b)(1) or had the secretary not taken action under subsection (b)(2).”

In general, employment decisions are made at the local level and vary based on the employee's job classification, each individual school entity's policies, applicable collective bargaining agreements, and individual employment contracts. Specific questions about federal and state labor laws, including compensation and job protections, should be directed to the school entity.

Individuals who work for schools but who are not being compensated during the mandated school closure may be eligible for Unemployment Compensation or Pandemic Unemployment Assistance (PUA) through the federal Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security (CARES) Act. [More information about these programs and other resources are available on the PA Department of Labor & Industry website.](#)

What is the new deadline for educators to complete their professional development requirements?

Educators have five years from the effective date of issuance of initial Instructional I certification to complete professional development requirements. Educators are expected to complete additional professional development every five years thereafter. Act 13 of 2020 gives educators another year to complete those requirements. The actual deadline will depend upon when the educator was certified and if the educator received any other extensions during that time.

What staff are essential?

Schools and postsecondary institutions ensure the equitable provision of multiple, life-sustaining services to students and families. Understanding that needs and service delivery vary across communities, decisions about essential staff should be made locally and in the context of [aggressive social distancingOpens In A New Window](#). Examples of essential services include, but are not limited to, administration, food preparation and distribution, housing, information technology, building maintenance, and operations (e.g., payroll).

180 Day School Year

What are the consequences for districts/schools that don't meet the 180-day requirements?

Act 13 of 2020 waives the School Code requirement (Section 1501) for a minimum 180-day school term—an action that builds on the Administration's earlier commitment that no district or school would be penalized for falling short of a 180-day school term. While waiving the 180-day school term requirement, Act 13 also requires school entities to make good faith efforts to implement continuity of education plans for the duration of the 2019-20 school year.

Recognizing that schools will not be penalized for failing to meet the minimum 180-day requirement because of COVID-19 response efforts, must schools adjust their calendars to meet those requirements?

Given the extensive period of closure, schools are not required to adjust calendars. However, [school entities are to report total days for the 2019-20 school year using the provided form](#) (PDF). The form should be submitted electronically to PDE's School Services Office no later than June 30, 2020.

Meals for Children

How can students access meals while schools are closed?

Pennsylvania sought and received approvals from the Federal government to allow schools the option to distribute meals to children age 18 and under at no cost while schools are closed. [Districts/schools that want to act on this Federal approval must apply to PDE](#). PDE continues to expedite approvals. Districts/schools may utilize essential staff to ensure students have access to meals. Although not required, participating schools are strongly encouraged to continue distributing and/or delivering school meals during breaks.

[PDE offers an interactive map that provides information on schools and districts distributing meals](#) at no cost to children age 18 and under. This map is updated regularly, but is not exhaustive. Contact your school or district for more information and to confirm the availability of food.

The [Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture offers a list of resources](#) that provide information on how to access and obtain emergency food assistance in communities across the state.

Visit the [Pennsylvania Department of Human Resources website to find a food pantry](#) near you.

Find a Summer Food Service Program meal distribution site near you via the [US Department of Agriculture's Summer Meal Site Finder mapping tool](#)[Opens In A New Window](#). You can also text "Summer Meals" to 97779 or call 1-866-348-6479 to find a local site.

Are volunteers who assist in food distribution and/or delivery to children required to have clearances under the Child Protective Services Act?

The Child Protective Services Act requires clearances only when a volunteer has "direct volunteer contact" which is defined as "the care, supervision, guidance, or control of children and routine interaction with children." Volunteers who are distributing and/or delivering food are not in charge of the child's care, supervision, guidance, or control; as such, they do not require clearances.

What is the Pandemic Electronic Benefit Transfer Program?

The federal Families First Coronavirus Response Act of 2020 provides temporary benefits, referred to as Pandemic Electronic Benefit Transfer (P-EBT), to families of school-aged children who would receive free or reduced-priced meals if school was in session. [Visit a webpage that provides information, resources, and answers to frequently asked questions about the Pandemic Electronic Benefit Transfer Program \(P-EBT\).](#)

Continuity of Education

Are schools required to provide any type of instruction during the closure of schools due to COVID-19 response efforts?

Continuity of education is the overarching term for educational practices that occur in the event of a prolonged school closure. To provide a consistent and equitable foundation for this work, PDE partnered with intermediate units (IUs) and the Pennsylvania Training and Technical Assistance Network (PATTAN) to develop guidance and evidence-based resources around continuity of education, and to provide technical assistance to school leaders.

PDE expects all schools to provide continuity of education for all students in the most appropriate and accessible ways possible, while also honoring the Governor's guidance for aggressive social distancing of at least six feet between individuals. Moreover, evolving United States Department of Education (USDE) guidance implies that Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and other federal protections continue to apply during mandated school closure.

How are schools expected to provide continuity of education during the remainder of the 2019-20 school year?

As schools are closed until the end of the school year, schools are expected to offer Planned Instruction at all grade levels as part of continuity of education plans. Planned Instruction is formal teaching and learning, similar to what occurs in a classroom setting. Within this process, teachers use planned courses of instruction of new concepts/skills aligned to grade level standards.

In addition to Planned Instruction, schools may offer Enrichment and Review, which consists of informal activities that reinforce or extend students' prior learning.

Both Planned Instruction and Enrichment and Review can take a variety of forms, including online/digital learning opportunities; non-digital learning opportunities (e.g., materials sent home

with students); and other approaches designed in partnership with local IUs and PATTAN centers. Implementation at the local level is based on feasibility, availability of resources, local student needs, access and equity considerations, and social distancing guidance.

Schools must work to meet the needs of all students including attention to free appropriate public education protections for students with disabilities and English as a second language services for English learners.

How will PDE collect continuity of education plans from school entities, as required by Act 13?

School entities are to submit continuity of education plans to the PDE using the following account: RA-EDContinuityofEd@pa.gov. Submissions should occur as soon as is practical but no later than Friday, April 17. School entities may implement continuity of education plans prior to submitting to PDE.

Who must submit continuity of education plans to PDE?

Act 13 of 2020 requires only school entities to submit continuity of education plans. Act 13 defines school entity as "any school district, intermediate unit, area career and technical school, charter school, cyber charter school or regional charter school a child attends in order to fulfill the compulsory attendance requirements of this act."

Are non-public and private academic schools required to submit continuity of education plans?

Act 13 does not require nonpublic or private academic schools to submit continuity of education plans to PDE. However, it is possible that school entities that place students in nonpublic or private schools may request continuity of education or other plans from those schools to include in the plans the school entity is required to submit to PDE. Nonpublic and private schools are advised to reach out directly to students' home school entity for guidance

Is technical assistance available to schools to provide Continuity of Education?

PDE, in collaboration with IUs and PATTAN, has developed support and guidance systems to assist schools with developing and implementing Continuity of Education plans during the COVID-19 closures. This support will be provided by the 29 intermediate units across the commonwealth and is available beginning March 24. School leaders can access materials by visiting the [PATTAN websiteOpens In A New Window](#) and may request district/school-specific guidance and support by contacting their local Intermediate Unit.

What free resources are available to support school communities in providing continued instruction to students?

On March 31, [PDE released a collection of free statewide resources](#) that are intended to help all schools that want to use them, including those not currently offering online platforms, those

requiring additional technology support, and those that may rely on traditional methods to continue educating students. In addition, PDE is offering equity grants for schools to purchase computer equipment or provide instructional materials.

Is a K-12 school or Preschool Early Intervention (EI) Program required to continue to provide FAPE to students with disabilities during a school closure caused by COVID-19 response efforts?

Guidance continues to evolve on this matter. Given this, PDE advises schools and EI programs to make every effort to provide some type of continuity of education for all students in the most appropriate and accessible ways possible. In so doing, schools and EI programs also need to ensure consideration for the provision of FAPE for students with disabilities and appropriate accommodations for English learners that are reasonable and appropriate based on student need and current circumstances.

In addition, districts and schools must ensure that, to the greatest extent possible, each student with a disability can be provided the special education and related services identified in the student's Individualized Education Program (IEP) or Section 504 plan.

Once school resumes, a child's IEP team (or appropriate personnel under Section 504) must make an individualized determination whether and to what extent compensatory services may be needed, consistent with applicable requirements, including to make up for any skills that may have been lost during the closure within a reasonable timeframe.

When distributing technology, should school entities accept any one of multiple types of identities?

When distributing technology (laptops, iPads, etc.) to students for continuity of education purposes, school entities must accept a variety of documentation as proof of identity for tracking and inventory purposes. Acceptable documentation includes, but is not limited to: a deed, a lease, current utility bill, current credit card bill, property tax bill, vehicle registration, driver's license, DOT identification card, or student identification card.

Special Education Services

PDE's Bureau of Special Education and the Bureau of Early Intervention will provide additional details and updated information directly to Local Education Agency (LEA) Special Education Directors.

Are LEAs (School Districts, Charter Schools, Cyber Charter Schools, IUs, CTCs, etc.) required to meet IDEA timelines for evaluations, re-evaluations, IEP meetings, and reporting?

LEAs should make every effort to meet federally- and state-mandated timelines including through virtual means or teleconferences to the extent appropriate and available. Typical

practices should be followed to the maximum extent possible, which includes ensuring parents and/or guardians are provided with the opportunity to participate meaningfully.

USDE released the following guidance concerning IEP meetings, evaluations, and re-evaluations during the COVID-19 closure: *IEP teams are not required to meet in person while schools are closed. If an evaluation of a student with a disability requires a face-to-face assessment or observation, the evaluation would need to be delayed until school reopens. Evaluations and re-evaluations that do not require face-to-face assessments or observations may take place while schools are closed, so long as a student's parent or legal guardian consents. These same principles apply to similar activities conducted by appropriate personnel for a student with a disability who has a plan developed under Section 504, or who is being evaluated under Section 504.* [USDE: Addressing the Risk of COVID-19 in Schools While Protecting the Civil Rights of Students \(March 16, 2020\). Opens In A New Window](#)

If LEAs are providing instruction during COVID-19 response efforts, how should they respond to IEPs that they are unable to implement as written?

Special education or related services may need to be adjusted through the IEP process. IEP teams should work to ensure that students are receiving appropriate services during the COVID-19 mandatory closure and ensuring alignment with aggressive social distancing guidelines. The mode of delivery might include schoolwork, packets, online learning, or some other appropriate learning adapted to the student's needs and individual situation. LEAs should continue to follow local policies regarding changing or amending an existing IEP.

According to previous guidance from the USDE Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP), if an LEA continues to provide instruction to the general school population during an extended closure due to a disaster, but is not able to provide services to a student with a disability in accordance with the student's IEP, the student's IEP team determines which services can be provided to appropriately meet the student's needs.

If school is closed for an extended period, should IEP teams convene to examine the extent to which FAPE was or was not provided during the closure?

LEAs are responsible for reviewing how the closure has impacted the delivery of special education and related services to students eligible for special education services. Once school resumes, a child's IEP team (or appropriate personnel under Section 504) must make an individualized determination whether, and to what extent, compensatory services or future services may be needed, consistent with applicable requirements, including to make up for any skills that may have been lost during the closure within a reasonable timeframe.

Where can I find more guidance, information, and considerations from PDE's Bureau of Special Education?

Access additional guidance, information, and considerations from PDE's Bureau of Special Education in the [COVID-19 section of their Resources/Contacts webpage](#).

Early Intervention

How is Early Intervention impacted by COVID-19?

Early Intervention (EI) programs continue to process referrals and teleintervention services are being provided, where appropriate. Parents who have a concern about their child's development may call [Pennsylvania's Early Intervention CONNECT: 800-692-7288](tel:800-692-7288) for assistance with locating resources and programs. If you are unable to connect with your EI program, or you have difficulty starting teleintervention services, please email the Office of Child Development and Early Learning: ra-ocdintervention@pa.gov.

Pre-K Counts/Head Start

Will the 180-day requirement waiver given to public schools also apply to Pre-K Counts (PKC) and Head Start Supplemental Assistance Programs (HSSAP)?

Yes.

Will payments continue to flow for PKC and HSSAP, whether open or closed?

Yes, PKC and HSSAP payments will continue to be made and will adhere to allowable grant expenditure and payment policies.

Can PKC and HSSAP programs continue to operate during the COVID-19 restrictions?

Yes, but only to serve children of employees of [life-sustaining businesses and services identified by the PA Department of Community and Development](#)[Opens In A New Window](#).

To continue operating, [programs must apply for a waiver](#)[Opens In A New Window](#). PKC and HSSAP programs may continue to operate while waiver consideration is pending.

Are all PKC and HSSAP programs able to apply for a waiver?

No. While schools remain closed, PKC and HSSAP programs physically located inside school buildings must adhere to school closure requirements and may not re-open until those school buildings re-open. Parents/caregivers who employed by life-sustaining business and need care for their children may contact their local Early Learning Resource center for assistance finding a suitable childcare alternative. [View Early Learning Resource Center contact information](#).

If a PKC and HSSAP program is closed, whether by choice or by mandate, may staff apply for Unemployment Compensation?

Since payments will continue to programs without interruption, the expectation is that program-funded staff will continue to be paid during closures and placed on administrative-type leave staff should not be expected to use sick time for COVID-19-related closures. Lead agencies with partners must pass through the agreed upon payments to their partners.

Can PKC or HSSAP funds be used to support non-PKC or HSSAP activities during a disaster or pandemic?

Exceptions to grantee cost allocation plans and certain technology purchases to support distance learning can be considered on a case by case basis during the COVID-19 pandemic only. PKC and HSSAP funding can only be spent according to the grant budget. Prior approval via a budget revision must be obtained before alternate spending plans can proceed.

If the PKC or HSSAP program is closed, can the PKC or HSSAP use its facilities and staff to provide emergency childcare for children whose parents are required to work during the pandemic?

If a grantee whose own facility is otherwise closed would like to use that facility to provide childcare for children whose parents or caregivers are employees of life-sustaining businesses and services, or businesses operating under a Department of Community and Economic Development waiver, the grantee must apply for and receive a waiver from the Pennsylvania Office of Child Development and Early Learning (OCDEL) before doing so.

If a grantee offers or directs staff to support emergency childcare operations in its own facilities, PKC and HSSAP dollars cannot be used for salaries or any other costs associated with the childcare operation. PKC and HSSAP staff may receive wages for hours worked in an emergency childcare setting, but only if the work they do is outside of the time they are expected to be available to support ongoing services to PKC or HSSAP children and families. For example, a PKC or HSSAP teacher working a late afternoon or night shift in an emergency childcare setting would be working outside of the normal time for PKC or HSSAP services and, thus, would be permitted to receive pay from the childcare organization for that time.

Should PKC and HSSAP programs continue to pay salaries to and benefits for their staff during this time?

Since payments will continue to programs without interruption, grantees are expected to continue paying program-funded staff during the mandated closure. Program-funded staff placed on administrative-type leave should not be expected to use sick time for COVID-19-related closures while the program is under a mandated closure. Lead agencies with partners must pass through the agreed upon payments to their partners.

This continued employment is critical to a program's continuity of operation and its ability to reopen for children as soon as it is safe to do so. To the extent possible, staff are expected to be engaged in supporting ongoing services to enrolled PKC and HSSAP children and families. Just as K12 schools are continuing to pay staff and provide remote learning and businesses are continuing with telework, PKC and HSSAP programs should be operating through similar accommodations. We acknowledge that the level of engagement will vary from staff to staff and program to program; however, OCDEL has directed grantees to continue to pay staff and cover their benefits while centers are closed.

Will agencies be allowed to lay off PKC and/or HSSAP program staff so that those staff may apply for Unemployment Compensation and the program can maintain solvency during the mandated closure period?

Since payments will continue to programs without interruption, agencies are expected to continue paying program-funded staff during the closure period.

If a provider has already laid off PKC or HSSAP program staff, what should they do?

Programs that have laid off PKC or HSSAP staff should pay staff per the initial COVID-19 FAQ guidance and should compensate staff for any time related to a PKC or HSSAP closure. Programs found out of compliance with this guidance will be subject to a grant reduction and future funding may be impacted.

Can the 10 percent categorical deviation rule be waived for FY19 PKC- and HSSAP-related expenses so that the upcoming budget revisions are the last for FY19 at both the Lead Agency and partner pass-through levels?

This rule will not be waived. Budget revisions that show expenditure deviations +/- 10 percent from the originally approved budget should be completed as needed and receive prior approval from all appropriate levels.

Transportation

How will subsidy payments for pupil transportation services work in the context of Act 13 of 2020?

Act 13 provides a basis for fiscal stabilization for school entities, school entity employees, and pupil transportation services.

The current pupil transportation formula compares an amount determined by a vehicle-based calculation to what the school district actually paid either to a transportation contractor or in providing its own transportation service. For both contracted services and district-provided operations, the state pays the school district based on the lower of the vehicle-based calculation or the actual cost of services. On average, this subsidy typically covers about 40 percent of school district transportation costs.

Under Act 13, PDE will pay Pupil Transportation Subsidy to school districts by comparing the amount determined by vehicle-based calculation to either: 1) actual costs associated with providing its own transportation service; 2) actual costs associated with the maintenance of a current contract; or 3) actual costs associated with a renegotiated contract. In all cases, payments will reflect a full school year.

More specifically, as a result of COVID-19 response efforts, Pupil Transportation Subsidy reporting for the 2019-20 school year for the period beginning March 13, 2020 may reflect the

days on which the school district paid for transportation even if students were not transported. This flexibility allows school districts to be more accurately credited for their actual costs.

[View further guidance on this.](#)

Will renegotiated transportation contracts that result in lower district payments reduce future subsidy payments?

The ultimate impact on 2020-21 transportation subsidy will depend on the actual costs incurred under any renegotiated contract.

Are public school entities required to continue nonpublic school transportation services while those public schools are closed during COVID-19 response efforts?

No. To further the Commonwealth's social distancing guidance, public schools will not provide any transportation services.

If the drivers employed by a transportation contractor were furloughed during the statewide closure of schools during the 2019-20 school year, are school districts eligible for transportation subsidy for those days?

Pupil Transportation Subsidy reporting for the 2019-20 school year for the period beginning March 13, 2020, may reflect the days on which the school district paid for transportation even if students were not transported. If a school district did not pay for transportation during that period, those days should not be reported in "Number of Days Transported" in the eTran application. A school district should consult its solicitor if it continued to pay its transportation contractor during that period but the transportation contractor did not maintain its workforce.

Statewide Assessments

What's the status of the 2019-20 statewide assessments given the statewide closure of schools?

[On March 19, the Secretary of Education cancelled all Pennsylvania System of School Assessment \(PSSA\) testing and Keystone exams](#) for the 2019-20 school year as a result of COVID-19. This cancellation includes the Pennsylvania Alternate System of Assessment (PASA). On March 20, [the USDE approved Pennsylvania's request to waive all Federal assessment, accountability, and reporting requirements for the 2019-20 school year.](#)

[On March 23, the Secretary also cancelled standardized testing for students in career and technical education \(CTE\) programs](#) for the 2019-20 school year. These include exams from the National Occupational Competency Testing Institute (NOCTI) and National Institute of Metalworking Skills (NIMS).

Student Teaching

Will PDE waive field experience requirements for teacher candidates?

[On April 9, 2020, Secretary Rivera waived a portion of the 12-week student teacher requirement](#) for educator preparation programs that are unable to meet the regulatory requirement of 22 Pa. Code 354.25(f) due to the Pandemic of 2020, provided that these programs:

1. Implement a research- and competency-based evaluation system, in accordance with forthcoming guidance, for candidates impacted by COVID-19-related school closures; and
2. Commit to providing targeted technical assistance to Pennsylvania local education agencies that hire educators impacted by these program modifications.

[Access additional information on student teaching modifications.](#)

Student Enrollment and Attendance

How is student enrollment and attendance impacted by COVID-19?

During the COVID-19 school closures, local education agencies (LEAs) continue to be responsible for enrolling and educating new students during the remainder of the 2019-20 school year. As such, LEAs should review their current enrollment policies and procedures and make decisions and adjustments, as needed, to provide all students with continuity of education. LEAs also should post enrollment information, including a point of contact, on their public website so that the information is easily accessible to parents/caregivers and other LEAs. [Access guidance, updates, and information on enrollment procedures, instruction, and child accounting reporting for the remainder of 2019-2020 school year.](#)

Federal Programs

How are federal programs impacted by COVID-19?

[Access guidance, updates, and information on Title IA, the Migrant Education Program, 21st Century Community Learning Centers, Perkins Grant, ELECT, and more.](#)

School Construction

May school districts continue construction projects?

School districts, which are independently elected political subdivisions (or “local political units” as described in the Governor’s guidance), should use best judgment in exercising their authority to continue critical construction projects. All school district construction decisions should appropriately balance public health and safety while ensuring the continued safety of critical infrastructure. School districts and contractors must ensure continuance of and compliance with social distancing and other mitigation measures to protect employees and the public, including virtual and telework operations (e.g., work from home) as the primary option when available, as

have been or will be established by the Department of Health and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. In-person work is only to be performed on the most limited basis possible.

Graduation Ceremonies and Requirements

Should schools hold graduation ceremonies and end of school year activities?

Graduation activities are a local decision made by each school. PDE does not approve a school's graduation plan.

Schools may hold virtual high school graduation and other end of school year ceremonies during the COVID-19 closure. The safety and security of all students and school communities are a priority for the commonwealth and all chief school administrators. Currently, restrictions on gatherings larger than ten people and aggressive social distancing recommendations are in place in some counties of the commonwealth. When closure restrictions are lifted by the Governor, schools may consider the appropriateness of holding such gatherings.

Can current seniors graduate at the end of the 2019-20 school year?

Yes. LEAs are responsible to ensure that the students anticipated to graduate in Spring 2020 graduate on time. No student should be restricted from completing their high school graduation requirements or pursuit of a post-secondary pathway due to the pandemic of 2020.

What academic requirements will be required of current seniors in the 2019-20 school year?

Establishing and calculating credits for coursework is the responsibility of each LEA. If graduating seniors have not completed their classes for the year due to the closure, illness, family illness, or related COVID-19 issues, the Department suggests the LEA use discretion to determine whether the students have completed sufficient course content to satisfy the LEA's established policy for course completion and academic proficiency. The Department recommends that LEAs provide all reasonable latitude for students to graduate on time.

How should LEAs address graduation for students with Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) anticipated to graduate in Spring 2020?

Title 22, Chapter 4 of the Pennsylvania Code, 22 Pa. Code Chapter 4 (Chapter 4), and local policies continue to govern graduation requirements for students with IEPs. A student with disabilities may graduate one of two ways; either through the fulfillment of high school graduation requirements set forth in Chapter 4 or upon the completion of their IEP goals, as determined by the IEP team. IEP teams may meet virtually to consider the impact of the COVID-19 school closure and make determinations considering each student's circumstances.

Can a student who is enrolled in a CTC or other approved CTE program graduate if they are unable to take the NOCTI, NIMS or an industry-based competency assessment due to the statewide closure of schools?

Yes, a student enrolled in any approved CTE program may graduate without taking or passing their associated industry-based competency assessment. A CTE Concentrator may graduate if they have demonstrated a high likelihood of success on an approved industry-based competency assessment or readiness for continued meaningful engagement in the CTE Concentrator's program of study as demonstrated by performance on benchmark assessments, course grades and other factors consistent with the CTE Concentrator's goals and career plan. The Department recommends that LEAs provide all reasonable latitude for CTE Concentrator's to graduate on time.

Should GPAs or class rank be modified this year?

Calculation of class rank and GPA are a local decision made by each LEA. If an LEA chooses to use pass/fail grades, it will need to be addressed in the local grading policy. Prior to amending any policies, LEAs should consider how the change may impact students' ability to enroll in postsecondary institutions after graduation or pursue other postsecondary pathways, including apprenticeships and employment.

How might COVID-19 related school closures impact high school transcripts?

This is an LEA decision. LEAs may want to consider noting on student transcripts that courses were abbreviated or grading policies were amended for the 2019-20 school year as a result of the pandemic to mitigate students' ability to enroll in postsecondary institutions after graduation or pursue other postsecondary pathways, including apprenticeships and employment.

How will schools distribute Scholarships/Academic Awards?

Distribution of Scholarships and Academic Awards is an LEA decision. LEAs should continue to engage Institutions of Higher Education and other outside agencies who provide student scholarships to ensure that the class of 2020 has access to the same financial assistance that would have been afforded them if the COVID-19 related school closures had not occurred. School counselors should be pro-active in sharing information on enrollment and financial aid with students and their families.

Homeschooling Programs

How are homeschooling programs impacted by COVID-19?

The Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) understands that the mandated closure of Pennsylvania schools due to the COVID-19 response effort may be causing some uncertainty for the remainder of the 2019-20 school year, particularly for families that elect to homeschool their children. [Access guidance, updates, and information on homeschooling programs.](#)

Nonpublic Schools

Can a nonpublic school continue to receive tuition payments from school districts and IUs for the 2019-20 school year?

According to section (k) of Act 13 of 2020:

"A private or non-public school which was closed because of the 2020 pandemic may not receive more or less payment from school entities for any student placed by a school entity and enrolled as of March 13, 2020, as long as the private or nonpublic school is offering continuity of education during the period of closure."

Professional Employee Evaluation

How are professional employee evaluations impacted by COVID-19?

During COVID-19 school closures, local education agencies (LEAs) continue to have a responsibility, under Act 82 of 2012 (Act 82), to complete professional employee evaluations for the 2019-2020 school year. However, for the 2019-2020 school year, [Secretary Rivera has waived the requirement for LEAs to include performance data](#) otherwise required under [section 1123\(b\)\(1\)\(ii\)](#) for a professional employee's performance rating under section 1123. [Access guidance, updates, and information on enrollment procedures, instruction, and child accounting reporting for the remainder of 2019-2020 school year.](#)

Work Permits for Minors

How are work permits for minors impacted by COVID-19?

The Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) understands that the mandated closure of Pennsylvania schools due to the COVID-19 response effort may be causing some uncertainty for the remainder of the 2019-20 school year, particularly for minors who wish to apply for a work permit and for school district personnel responsible for issuing work permits. PDE and the Pennsylvania Department of Labor and Industry (L&I) have temporarily modified the process for applying for a work permit to enable work permits to be issued during school closures due to the COVID-19 pandemic. [Access guidance, information, and resources on work permits for minors.](#)

Child Accounting Reporting

Can LEAs continue to submit Act 80 requests for the 2019-20 school year?

Yes. If an LEA included Act 80 days in its board-approved calendar, it may continue to submit Act 80 requests through PDE's online Act 80 Exception System. The submission of Act 80 days for 2019-20 will not impact an LEA's number of instructional days or the calculated days in session. However, if an LEA has a need for this option, such as addressing requirements in teacher contracts, it is available.

How should LEAs report the School Calendar template's instructional day fields for the 2019-20 school year?

Because child accounting membership will only be collected for the period of July 1, 2019 through the announcement of statewide school closures on March 13, 2020, and to simplify the reporting process, the instructional day fields should be reported as follows:

- Number of Scheduled School Days (field #14) = actual number of student instructional days (do not include full day Act 80 days in this field)
- Total Days in Session Lost Due to Strike (field #16) = 0
- Total Days in Session Lost Due to Act 80 (field #17) = 0
- Total Days in Session Lost Due to Other (field #18) = 0
- Total Make-Up Days (field #19) = 0

How should LEAs report the Instruction End Date (field #12) on the School Calendar template?

If the LEA was in session on March 13, then the Instruction End Date (field #12) should be March 13, 2020.

If the LEA was not in session on March 13, then the Instruction End Date should be the last instructional day held prior to March 13.

If only one or a subset of the LEA's school buildings were closed prior to March 13, those buildings must be reported on a separate calendar(s) to ensure that Average Daily Attendance and Average Daily Membership (ADM) are calculated correctly.

How should LEAs report membership and attendance on the Student Calendar Fact template?

Days Enrolled (field #8) should be the sum of the days present and days absent when school was in session from July 1, 2019 to March 13, 2020. This number cannot exceed the number reported in field #14 (Number of Scheduled School Days) of the School Calendar template.

Days Present (field #9) should be the number of days present when school was in session from July 1, 2019 to March 13, 2020.

Days Absent-Unexcused (field #16) should be the number of unexcused absences based on local attendance policy when school was in session from July 1, 2019 to March 13, 2020.

How does PDE's action on additional Flexible Instructional Days (FIDs) for the 2019-20 school year impact an LEA's PIMS-Child Accounting data submission?

The child accounting attendance and membership reporting period for the 2019-20 school year is from July 1, 2019 through March 13, 2020. Therefore, the utilization of FIDs beyond March 13, 2020 has no impact on an LEA's child accounting submission.

However, any approved FIDs for days up to and including March 13 should be reflected in an LEA's 2019-20 school year child accounting data submission.

Will PDE grant any flexibility in how Accuracy Certification Statements (ACS) are submitted?

Yes. LEAs must provide an ACS to complete the PIMS-Child Accounting data submission.

However, if an LEA's Chief School Administrator does not have access to the equipment necessary to sign and scan the document, they may use an electronic signature option available via Adobe Fill and Sign. If an LEA chooses the latter method, only the Chief School Administrator may email the completed document to PDE.

How will Act 13's waiving of the 180-day requirement impact the 2019-20 school year ADM calculation?

ADM is calculated by dividing the number of days a student was enrolled by the school district's days in session. Because all LEAs are reporting child accounting membership as of March 13, 2020, a school district's days in session will automatically be reduced to be proportional to the reported days enrolled. This calculation will not negatively impact state subsidies that use ADM.

Should LEAs continue to send form PDE-4605 (Determination of District of Residence for Students in Facilities or Institutions)?

Yes. The educating LEA should continue to determine the school district of residence for students in placements and send the PDE 4605 to the identified school district of residence.

Who is responsible for the tuition of a student in a placement on or after March 13, 2020?

The cost for a student's tuition will remain with the LEA responsible for payment as of March 13, 2020.

How will an LEA determine a daily rate for services? Do LEAs need to adjust invoices that were sent for education provided prior to March 13, 2020?

An LEA that calculates a daily tuition rate, based on an annual tuition rate, should use the days in session on the original calendar (2019-20 school year) that was in place prior to the COVID-19 response efforts (i.e., 180 days). However, the child accounting membership for any education provided after March 13 will not be reported to PDE.

Property Taxes

How will the COVID-19 school closures impact property taxes?

While property taxes are administered locally, school districts are incurring increased costs to implement continuity of education and distance learning for all students. Because the delivery of

these unanticipated educational services is ongoing, the state and local revenue needed to fund those services is currently unknown.

Student Grades and Promotion

How are LEAs to handle the provision of final grades and promotion of students during the statewide COVID-19 closures?

Calculating and assigning grades for coursework is the responsibility of each LEA. The Department encourages LEAs to assign grades based on the best information available. If students have not completed a course in its entirety, chief school administrators should consider if they have enough information to calculate and assign a final grade.

As is customary with grading policies, schools should ensure that all students and families are aware of how grades are determined, particularly if there are changes in grading practices due to extended school closures.

Prior to amending any grading policies, particularly policies at the secondary level, LEAs should consider how the change may impact students' ability to enroll in postsecondary institutions after graduation or pursue other postsecondary pathways, including apprenticeships and employment. If there is a potential impact, LEAs should consider noting on student transcripts that courses were abbreviated or grading policies were amended for the 2019-20 school year, as a result of the pandemic, to ease students' ability to pursue their chosen postsecondary pathways.

LEAs should provide support for students who are failing a course as of March 13, 2020 and provide them the opportunity, to the extent feasible, to demonstrate learning in the subject matter of the course and receive credit for the course.

How should LEAs handle promotion of students to the next grade level at the end of the 2019-20 school year?

LEAs are responsible to ensure that students anticipated to move to the next grade level are able to do so. No student should be restricted from completing their current year course requirements due to the pandemic of 2020.

Can summer school be offered to students if needed?

Summer school offerings, including credit recovery programs, are at the discretion of each LEA, but would be subject to any Commonwealth restrictions, closures, or social distancing recommendations that may be in effect at the time. Chief school administrators should consider availability of resources and access for students when offering summer school options.

Are LEAs required to report attendance to PDE during the statewide closure?

LEAs are not required to report student attendance to PDE during the closure, though they should create local expectations for student learning and take attendance for their local records.

Students are expected to fully participate in continuity of education plans to the maximum extent possible. All LEAs should establish a process for tracking student learning and ensuring that all students are participating in continuity of education programming.

Postsecondary Education

How is postsecondary education impacted by COVID-19?

[Access guidance, updates, and information on retrieving personal belongings, continuous operations, educational specialists, pass or fail grades, student loans, exceptions for certain workforce training programs, and more.](#)

Youth in Foster Care

How can communities ensure educational stability for youth in foster care?

[Access guidance, technical assistance, information, and more.](#)

Continuing Professional Education

How does Act 13 impact the continuing education period for professional educators?

Act 13 provides a one-year extension for a professional educator's current continuing professional education compliance period beginning on March 27, 2020. [Access guidance and information on Act 45 and Act 48.](#)

Phased Reopening of Pennsylvania

What is Pennsylvania's plan for reopening?

On April 22, Governor Wolf announced a detailed plan for reopening Pennsylvania categorized in three phases: red, yellow, and green. Phases will be assigned based on conditions in a county, counties, or region. [Learn more about these phases and the plan to reopen Pennsylvania.](#)

Future Ready PA Index

How do the impacts of COVID-19 affect the fall 2020 edition of the Future Ready PA Index?

Mandated school closures, the suspension of statewide assessments, and a range of data quality considerations will necessarily reduce the availability of certain Future Ready measures. At the same time, Future Ready's dashboard format means that lagging and fast fact data can still be reported. [Access guidance and information on the Future Ready Pa Index - Fall 2020 Edition.](#)

Flexible Instructional Days

May public school entities apply for the flexible instructional day (FID) program for the 2019-20 school year in light of the COVID-19 pandemic?

Yes. Act 13 of 2020 (Act 13) authorized the Secretary of the Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) to waive the FID application deadline for the 2019-20 school year and to increase the number of FIDs a public school entity may use in the 2019-20 school year, which was done via an Order dated April 9, 2020.

Applications to utilize FIDs during the 2019-20 school year may be submitted now through June 15, 2020.

If a public school entity's FID application was accepted prior to March 13, 2020, does it need to submit a special request to use an unlimited number of FIDs for the 2019-20 school year?

No. Public school entities with previously accepted FID applications may use an unlimited number of FIDs for the 2019-20 school year without submitting a special request to PDE. The limit of five (5) FIDs remains for the 2020-21 and 2021-22 school years.

Can a public school entity use a FID due to the COVID-19 pandemic? How many FIDs can be used?

With the passage of Act 13 and the Secretary's April 9 Order, public school entities that have FID applications accepted for the 2019-20 school year may use an unlimited number of FIDs during the COVID-19 response effort. The public school entity must meet all of the requirements for a FID related to notifications, equal access to resources/instructors for all students, including attention to free appropriate public education protections for students with disabilities and English as a second language services for English learners, providing health services, and tracking student attendance and participation under Article XIII.

Can any public school entity use a FID for the 2019-20 school year?

No. Only those public school entities that had a FID application accepted prior to March 13, 2020 and public school entities that have FID applications accepted by June 15, 2020 can use FIDs during the 2019-20 school year. Public school entities that do not submit a FID application should review information on PDE's COVID-19 FAQ related to continuity of education plans.

When can public school entities apply for the 2020-21 school year FID program?

The 2020-21 application became available on April 17, 2020. Completed applications and all supporting documents (sample exemplars, approved school board minutes, and signed assurance page) must be submitted to PDE no later than Sept. 1, 2020.

When will PDE notify public school entities if their FID applications are accepted for the 2020-21 school year?

PDE will make determinations on all 2020-21 FID applications on or before Nov. 1, 2020. A public school entity may not use a FID until the public school entity's FID application is accepted by PDE.

Can a private or nonpublic school entity use a FID program for the 2019-20 school year? How about the 2020-21 school year?

24 P.S. § 15-1506, the state law that allows public school entities to develop FID programs to meet the 180 instructional day requirement, does not apply to nonpublic schools. However, a nonpublic school may use technology or other appropriate means to provide instruction to students on days when a school building is prevented from opening.

While nonpublic schools are not required to apply to PDE, procedures are to be in place to ensure the following:

1. The enforcement of student attendance under Article XIII.
2. The fulfillment of the minimum number of hours of instruction per year under section 1327, 24 P.S. § 13-1327.

Fingerprinting

Due to the pandemic, do current educators and school employees and independent contractors and their employees have additional time to renew their federal background checks?

Signed into law on May 8, 2020, Act 18 of 2020 provides additional time for school employees to renew their FBI fingerprint-based background checks due to the pandemic. Under Act 18, employees of public, private, and nonpublic schools, as well as independent contractors and their employees who work with schools, have until December 31, 2020 to renew their FBI fingerprint-based background checks at an approved IdentoGO location. [Access guidance, updates, and more information on Act 18 of 2020.](#)

Child Care

Where do I find guidance and resources on child care providers?

As regions or counties move into the yellow phase of [Governor Wolf's process to Reopen Pennsylvania](#) plan, child care providers may open in compliance with the [CDC's Guidance for Child Care Programs that Remain Open](#). Providers can access the Office of Child Development and Early Learning's materials, which are located on the [Pennsylvania Key website](#), to support their understanding of this guidance. Additional [materials developed by the CDC](#) are also available.

On June 2, 2020, the [Pennsylvania Department of Human Services](#) (DHS) released a [Frequently Asked Questions guide for families](#) in need of child care and parents with children that will be returning to a child care facility in counties moving to the yellow or green phase of reopening. Parents, caregivers, and families can access additional information and resources on the Pennsylvania Department of Human Services' [COMPASS website](#).

CDL Truck Driver Training

Is CDL truck driver training permitted to resume in Pennsylvania?

CDL truck driver training programs may resume in counties that are designated as yellow or green. Training must follow the guidelines provided by the Pennsylvania Department of Health (DOH) and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

Such instruction shall employ physical distancing measures, universal masking when feasible in accordance with highway safety standards, and applicable DOH and CDC guidelines. During the yellow phase, class size is limited to 25 or fewer students for in-person instruction and road and range training should be limited to one instructor and one student in the truck at the same time. Cleaning protocols should be maintained in accordance with CDC guidelines between each rotation of students using the truck.

In all instances, training programs must operate in the manner best designed to prevent or mitigate the spread of COVID-19 and to ensure the safety of the communities in which they are located and the communities they serve. Programs are expected to employ remote or virtual methods of training and instruction whenever possible. Students must also wear appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE) whenever possible in accordance with all highway safety protocols. Programs should strive to minimize opportunities for personal interaction as such interactions provide greater opportunities for the transmission of COVID-19.

Food Service Costs

How will school entities be reimbursed for costs associated with providing food services during the period of COVID-19 school closures?

The National School Lunch and School Breakfast Programs are administered at the federal level by the United States Department of Agriculture and at the state level by the Pennsylvania Department of Education's Division of Food and Nutrition. Reimbursement is based upon a specified rate and the number of meals served. Because federal and state funds can only be disbursed based upon verifiable data, school entities will be reimbursed at the established federal and state reimbursement rates for actual meals served. School entities should consider whether local ESSER funds may be utilized to support additional costs.