School Guidance

Answers to Common Questions

Information will be updated on this page as it's made available - please check back frequently.

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Closed Schools

1. What schools are closed?

Under [Governor Wolf's directive](#), all schools in Pennsylvania are closed. 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/services; and Private Academic Nursery Schools and locally funded prekindergarten activities. Additionally, postsecondary institutions have suspended in-person instruction and non-essential services.

2. 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.

Essential Staff

3. 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

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

PDE will not penalize districts/schools that fail to meet the minimum 180-day requirements as a result of COVID-19 response efforts.

5. 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, schools will be required to report their total days and hours for the 2019-20 school year on a simplified form; completed forms will be deemed approved.

Meals for Children

6. How can students access meals while schools are closed?

Pennsylvania sought and received approval from the Federal government to allow schools the option to distribute meals 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 is partnering with the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture, the Pennsylvania Department of Human Services, the Pennsylvania Emergency Management Agency, other state agencies, the American Red Cross, and public and private partners to expand these efforts.

7. 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.

Continuity of Education

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

PDE strongly encourages all schools to provide some type of 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. Also know that evolving United States Department of Education (USDE) guidance implies that Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and other federal protections still apply whether or not schools offer continuity of education.

Continuity of education is the broad term given to 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 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.

9. For school entities considering continuity of education, what options are available?

Schools may provide continuity of education through either or a combination of the following:

- Planned Instruction: Planned Instruction is formal teaching and learning similar to that which occurs in a classroom setting. Within this process, teachers use planned courses of instruction of new concepts/skills aligned to grade level standards.
- Enrichment and Review: Enrichment and Review consists of informal activities that reinforce or extend students' prior learning. New standards and skills are not addressed through Enrichment and Review.

These options 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 regional PATTAN centers. The decision to employ one or more of these methods is made at the local level based on feasibility, availability of resources, access and equity considerations, and in accordance with aggressive social distancing guidance.

Whatever decision is made, schools must work to meet the needs of all students, with particular attention to free appropriate public education (FAPE) for students with disabilities and English as a second language (ESL) services for English Learners (EL).

10. 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.

11. 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.

Special Education Services

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

12. 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](#)

13. Can LEAs provide enrichment or review activities for students with disabilities?

Yes. Although not required, LEAs are strongly encouraged to provide enrichment or review activities to all students. If provided, enrichment or review activities must be made available and accessible to all students.

14. 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.

15. 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 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.

Early Intervention

16. Will Preschool Early Intervention (EI) services be offered while schools are closed?

EI programs should suspend all services to children and families in alignment with public K-12 closures. If the Preschool Early Intervention administrative offices are open

while EI services are suspended, referrals to EI should continue to be managed by the program; once services resume, referrals can proceed.

Pre-K Counts/Head Start

17. 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.

18. 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.

19. 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 DevelopmentOpens In A New Window](#).

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

20. 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.](#)

21. 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.

Transportation

22. 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.

Statewide Assessments

23. 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

24. Will PDE waive field experience requirements for teacher candidates?

The Wolf Administration is working with the General Assembly to provide the Secretary with authority to adjust field experience and other requirements impacted by school or educator preparation program closures resulting from COVID-19 response efforts.

K-12 Enrollment

25. Are LEAs responsible for enrolling students within five days of when a child attempts to enroll while schools are closed or not providing instruction due to COVID-19 response efforts?

No. During the time an entire LEA is closed or not providing instruction due to the unprecedented COVID-19 response efforts, an LEA is not responsible for enrolling children within five days.

Once an LEA (or any schools within the LEA) reopens or resumes instruction, the LEA should permit any child to attend school or participate in instruction on the next school day after the day on which the child is presented for enrollment, and in all cases within

five (5) business days of the LEA's receipt of the required documentation as set forth in the [Enrollment of Students BEC](#).

PDE recognizes that some students and families may move during the closure and encourages LEAs to open lines of communication with those families to ensure an efficient process when schools reopen.