DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

School Closure Guidance for Public School Districts and Charter Schools

Version: March 15, 2020

Contents

Vision

Minnesota is the best state in the country for children to grow up in – those of all races, ethnicities, religions, economic statuses, gender identities, sexual orientations, (dis)abilities, and zip codes.

Guiding Principles

- *Practice servant leadership*
- *Treat everyone with respect and dignity*
- *Do the right thing, especially when it is difficult*
- *Ask how your actions are reinforcing or removing structural inequity*
- *Promote the common good over narrow special interests*
- *Be accessible, transparent, and accountable*
- *Include voices from communities who will be most impacted*

Priorities

Minnesota does best when state agencies and community partners collaborate to achieve common goals. We will solve problems in education, health care, environment and energy, housing, jobs, transportation, and so much more by focusing on these key priorities:

- *Children and Families*
- *Equity and Inclusion*
- *Thriving Communities*
- *Fiscal Accountability and Measurable Results*
- *Minnesota's Environment*

Purpose

Ensure that every student in the state of Minnesota receives an equitable education and has equal access to learning and instruction during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Overview

Minnesota school districts and charters are preparing instructional plans that will allow meaningful, relevant learning to take place while schools are closed. Schools are expected to develop lessons utilizing a distance learning model for every level in grades public PreK-8 and each graduation requirement course for grades 9-12.

We do expect that ALL Minnesota students continue to receive an education. The Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) and the State of Minnesota are committed to continuing to provide stable funding and reliable support and technical assistance to schools.

This document is to be used by districts and charter schools in preparation for distance learning. Districts should use the Governor's Executive Order 20-02 in all planning and preparations.

During the March 18 to March 27 planning period outlined in the Governor's Executive Order as well as during any time when all staff are expected to report to work, it is important to follow all MDH COVID-19 guidelines. This includes not asking staff to report to work based on higher risk status or other conditions.

This information will be updated as districts and other stakeholders provide feedback and additional questions.

Distance Learning

Distance Learning defined: Students engaging in distance learning have access to appropriate educational materials and receive daily interaction with their licensed teacher(s).

Minnesota Department of Education Guidance on Distance Learning

MDE expects that students who participate in distance learning have full access to appropriate educational materials. Full guidance on distance learning from MDE.

Districts and charters must maintain educational continuity for schools and programs. As a district or charter, you must ensure equity in your plans. School districts and charters must ensure equal access to ALL students.

As your district or charter implements a distance learning model, the Federal and State requirements must be followed. This means that students need to be able to participate in their learning equitably and have access to all relevant services and supports. Considerations include, but are not limited to:

- Ensuring all students in the school or district will have equal access to the learning and required materials, including technology.
- If using an online learning system, ensure it can effectively support the district's unique learning and teaching needs, including the ability to provide differentiated instruction as well as one-on-one support for students who need it. Regardless of where the learning is happening, supports identified on a student's Individualized Education Program (IEP) or 504 Plan must be provided (more detail below). Individual Learning Plans for English Language Learners must also be followed.
- Providing training to staff, students, and parents/guardians on implementation of your distance learning model and the district's expectations.
- Programming options for school nurses, school counselors, school psychologists, school social workers, paraprofessionals, other school specialists and cultural liaisons.
- Tracking the attendance of both students and staff.
- Ensuring the distance learning model in use is secure and will not allow for the release of protected student or staff information.

Schools should provide materials for students to continue their learning. Each school would determine the most appropriate way to communicate and provide instruction for each student which could include some/all of the following:

- Paper packets or worksheets, which could be distributed daily by bus route or collected several times a week at a central location
- Textbooks

- Telephone instruction
- Online resources (take into account availability of broadband)
- Instruction via the school's learning management system (LMS)

Care for Children of Families of Emergency Workers

- School districts and charter schools should provide care to, at a minimum, district- and charter-enrolled students aged 12 and under who are children of emergency workers critical to the State's response to COVID-19.
- School districts and charters will handle the verification of students, which may include securing a letter from the employer or showing an employment badge.
- The Governor encourages school districts and charters to also provide extended care – before and after school hours – to students of emergency workers.

Healthcare staff as described below:
- Health care providers and systems, including hospitals and clinics
- Post-acute and long-term care facilities, including nursing and assisted living facilities
- Other health systems and organizations, such as:
  - Home Care workers
  - Personal Care Assistants
  - Ambulance/emergency
  - Direct Care and Treatment

Other emergency staff, including:
- First responders
- Firefighters
- Personnel providing correctional services
- Essential Court personnel
- Minnesota State Veterans Homes staff
- State and local public health agency employees
- MNsure Navigators
- County financial/eligibility workers
- County case managers
- Or any county staff in emergency management or health and human services

To support this critical effort, work with your education staff and community partners, including your unions, as valuable partners with expertise in planning and communicating this collective work.

Nutrition

Districts must provide meals for all children who need them, no matter their resources and no matter what school they attend, in the way that works best for your community, such as grab-and-go or delivery.

Q-and-A on continuing school meals:

- How do we continue to feed children?
    - Schools will have two options to serve meals when schools are closed:
        i. Schools can apply for a waiver to MDE to serve student meals under Seamless Summer Option (SSO)
        ii. Schools can apply for a waiver to MDE to serve student meals under Summer Food Service Program (SFSP)
- How do we apply for the waivers?
    - Districts and charter schools will apply through the designated Survey Gizmo that will be distributed to school nutrition directors from MDE. The application will include how you will unitize meals, delivery, how to count, and how to serve low-income children.
    - Once approved for the waiver, the second step is for the school to submit an application through CLiCS. MDE application staff will then review and approve the CLiCS application. Once approved, meal site would be open to anyone 18 and under who requested a meal.
- What information do I need to provide to MDE for the waiver?
    - Which sites will be closed
    - Start date and time period you are seeking to serve
    - F/R eligibility data of each site
    - Method of distribution
    - Meals offered
    - Plan for communicating changes with parents and households
    - Method of counting and claiming meals
    - Type and orders of disposable packaging
- Do we need to follow the meal pattern? What is the meal pattern?
    - Yes, meal pattern must be met and the specific meal pattern will correspond with the program option you choose. Please watch additional technical assistance from MDE.
- What is the meal service for SSO and SFSP?
    - Meals must be distributed unitized. For example:
        - Food trucks/bus
        - Bagged lunch
        - Delivered to homes
        - Grab-and-Go/Pick-up
    - Food must be kept according to proper food handling procedures. For example, if handing out food in a parking lot, must keep milk cold, food hot (if applicable), and use disposable paper/plastic products. Consult updated USDA and MDH guidance on extra measures particular to COVID-19.
- How do I train my staff?
    - MDE will be creating a webinar for schools and school nutrition staff
    - Establish a plan for phone and email triage
    - Review written waiver and guidance materials
- How long do I have to get my application in?

- o   Applications must be approved before service can begin unless the SSO option is chosen.
  - o   If an application contains all the required information, it will be approved quickly.
  - o   Watch for further guidance from MDE or contact MDE staff.
- Can At-Risk Afterschool meal programs shift to SFSP if under a SFSP sponsor?
  - o   At-Risk does not need to shift to SFSP. It can still operate an afterschool meals program.
- How many meals can be provided with SFSP?
  - o   SFSP can provide one meal and two snacks or two meals and one snack.
- Can a nonprofit sponsor of At-Risk at a school site still provide meals?
  - o   The At-Risk program can still operate if a school is closed but still in session (distance learning). However, USDA is not offering a non-congregate waiver for At-Risk sites. You must deliver meals in a congregate setting. If a school site has been ordered to close, it may not be available for At-Risk service.

MDE received a waiver from USDA that allows schools to continue operating the National School Lunch Program in a non-congregate setting. MDE will provide additional guidance to districts now that this option is available.

MDE is awaiting guidance from USDA on opportunities for CACFP flexibilities. MDE will provide this information as soon as it is received from USDA.

Implementation Guidance

- Ensure all the students' nutritional needs are addressed. This includes students with allergies and other food restrictions. Make sure to mark the food appropriately.
- Create multiple geographically located food distribution centers where necessary. Students are not allowed to eat inside the school.
- Ensure that all necessary personnel are stationed to maximize student and staff safety and that all distribution sites are supervised.
- Explore distribution strategies that will avoid large gatherings of people and make social distancing possible.
- Students can receive two meals a day (one breakfast, one lunch, or one snack in any combination). Both meals can be distributed at once either via pick-up, drive-up or delivery.
- Only parent/guardians/students themselves may pick up food. Children do not need to be accompanied by an adult to receive food.
- Allow ample and reasonable amount of time for meal pick-up for each meal service, recognizing that families may be experiencing challenges during this time.
- Use multiple modes of communication to inform students and families of available food service, including time, location, and method of distribution.
- Consider multiple methods of distribution, such as drive up; walk up; satellite locations, such as libraries, churches, park districts, and youth centers; home delivery via bus routes; and other options.

Meals and/or Instructional Material Pick-up

Implementation Options for Consideration

- Drive-up (for meals): School personnel will communicate with families the time frame in which food (breakfast/lunch) will be distributed. Families will drive to their home school or alternative location, provide their name and a sacked breakfast and lunch will be given. Each family will be provided with one meal per eligible child. Both breakfast and lunch can be given to family at once. If the home school is located on a busy intersection, another location of the school can be used.
- Walk up (to school building): Children and adults will walk to the school or alternative location to pick-up food and/or materials
- Satellite locations (if opened): Any place that families have access to. School personnel should communicate with community facilities to determine if their location is open and available to serve as a food distribution center. Locations other than schools, i.e., any place that families have access to. Community facilities could include:
  - Libraries
  - Places of worship
  - Park districts
  - Youth/community centers
- Home delivery: School staff member or designee will deliver meal(s) and/or materials to student homes. Families who lack transportation or with medically fragile children can request that food be delivered to their residence. Schools should initiate plans with families to make arrangements prior to delivery. For meals, both breakfast and lunch can be delivered at once.

Health and Wellness

Please consider the health and wellness of your students. How will you ensure the short and long term health and wellness of your:

- Students
- Staff
- Families
- Community
- Volunteers
- Contractors

Talking to Children about COVID-19

Concern over this new virus can make children and families anxious. It is very important to remember that children look to adults for guidance on how to react to stressful events. If adults seem overly worried, children's anxiety may rise. Adults should reassure children that health and school officials are working hard to ensure that people throughout the country stay healthy. Children also need factual, age appropriate information about the potential seriousness of disease risk, so the focus of conversation should be concrete instructions about how to

avoid infections and the spread of disease. Teaching children positive measures, talking with them about their fears, and giving them a sense of some control over their risk of infections can help reduce anxiety.

Additional information and specific guidelines can be found at: [Talking to Children about COVID-19](#)

Mental Health and Well-being

The stress of preparing for COVID-19 and school closure can increase the worry and anxiety of students, staff, families, and communities. The following resources and tips can be used by school and district leaders to protect your health and well-being of those you serve. Districts should work through plans for smooth continuity of services including school-linked mental health and other student supports.

Bullying and Harassment

COVID-19 is not at all connected to race, ethnicity, or nationality. School staff should be mindful that bullying, intimidation, or harassment of students based on actual or perceived race, color, national origin, or disability (including the actual disability of being infected with COVID-19 or perception of being infected) may result in a violation of state and federal civil rights laws. School districts must take immediate and appropriate action to investigate what occurred when responding to reports of bullying or harassment. If parents and families believe their child has experienced bullying, harassment, or intimidation related to the COVID-19 outbreak, they should contact their school principal or their designee.

Mental Health Support Resources

The impact of a school closure often goes beyond academics. Schools need be aware of and prepared to cope with the potential impact these closures will have on the mental health and wellbeing of students, staff, and families. The following resources can help schools and districts provide supports during school closure.

Minnesota Department of Education - https://education.mn.gov/MDE/dse/safe/res/resp/

National Association of School Psychologist - https://www.nasponline.org/resources-and-publications/resources-and-podcasts/school-climate-safety-and-crisis/health-crisis-resources

National Alliance on Mental Illness Minnesota - https://namimn.org/support/mental-health-support-and-information-on-covid-19/

Center for Disease Control and Prevention - https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prepare/managing-stress-anxiety.html

The Los Angeles County Department of Health Guidance for School Administrators - http://www.publichealth.lacounty.gov/media/Coronavirus/GuidanceForSchools.pdf

The California Department of Public Health School Guidance on COVID-19 - https://www.cdph.ca.gov/Programs/CID/DCDC/CDPH%20Document%20Library/School%20Guidance_ADA%20Compliant_FINAL.pdf

The Colorín Colorado Coronavirus: Multilingual Resources for School -
https://www.colorincolorado.org/coronavirus

The Child Mind Institute's Talking to Kids About the Coronavirus. Students may experience hunger, abuse, or lack of healthcare in their homes and with their families. Know local resources and be prepared to help - https://childmind.org/article/talking-to-kids-about-the-coronavirus/

SAMSHA's Taking Care of Your Behavioral Health: Tips for Social Distancing, Quarantine, and Isolation During an Infectious Disease Outbreak - https://store.samhsa.gov/system/files/sma14-4894.pdf

SAMHA's Coping With Stress During Infectious Disease Outbreaks - https://store.samhsa.gov/system/files/sma14-4885.pdf

Attendance and Truancy

Ensure your attendance and absence policy accommodates for the implementation of your distance learning model. Clearly communicate expectations to students, staff and parents. All students should follow individual district, school, or charter school policies and guidelines for excused absences. Please exercise caution before starting the truancy process. Please coordinate with your county on any decision.

Special Education Services – IEP or 504 Plan

This section ensures that students with disabilities will continue to receive specialized instruction and related services through a distance learning model to meet their identified needs.

This section provides guidance for districts to develop a distance learning model that includes equitable access to specialized instruction and related services for students with disabilities so that they have access to general education standards and continue to demonstrate progress toward the general education standards and IEP goals.

This section has resources including written guidance from the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs.

Provision of education for students (birth – 21) with disabilities is another important consideration when engaging in this planning.

In the event of extended school closures, the school district remains responsible for the free appropriate public education (FAPE) of its students eligible for special education services who have an individualized education program (IEP) or 504 plan. Districts and charters must plan how they will continue to meet the requirements of Part B (3- 21) and Part C (birth to three) of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), Part B and Part C. Please consider the following:

- Develop a process to communicate with parents and guardians regarding their child's services, which should include discussion regarding amending IEP's to address how best to meet the student's needs in

a flexible learning model. This includes direct specialized instruction, related services, and accommodations.

- o Consider what other IEP team members, and agencies and organizations should be included in the communication, including contracted providers and non-public agencies. Tele-related services can be used to address needs such as speech and language, and mental health services.
- o Review the delivery of special education and related services, as well as general education curriculum to ensure that students with disabilities have equal access to distance learning. This includes children from birth through age 21. This will necessitate communication between the case manager, the general education teachers, the parent/guardian and related services providers to ensure that students with disabilities can be appropriately involved and make progress toward the general education standards and IEP goals.
- o Districts will need to address translation and interpreter needs for students and families when developing and providing instructional materials.
- o Consider the use of hot spots and free internet services being offered by internet companies for the delivery of instruction and for due process procedures.
- o Consider delivering instructional materials to students through the school bus transportation routes.
- Develop a protocol to communicate with school administrators and educators in order to prepare staff to plan for the needs of students eligible for special education, child find activities, evaluations/reevaluations, and IEP implementation.
  - o IEP's must continue to be implemented.
  - o Address the process you will use to hold IEP meetings to review IEP goals and services, and the process to conduct evaluations and reevaluations. This could include virtual meetings and phone conferences.

Review the [memo from the US Department of Education, Office of Special Education](#) Programs with questions and answers to federal special education issues related to school closure, district closure and services and programming for medically fragile children on IEPs and educational opportunities, such as distance learning.

Q & A on Special Education Services

- When schools move to a distance learning model for all students as the result of a state-ordered school closure, how should schools provide special education services? Will there be compensatory time?
  - o See OSEP's Q and A document above, question A1.
- What does direct instruction mean in the use of a distance learning model during the COVID-19 emergency?
  - o Instruction may be provided by special education staff, including related service providers. Districts will need to address translation and interpreting needs for students and families when developing and providing instructional materials.
  - o This can occur through a variety of means consistent with the distance learning section of this document. This includes:
    - ▪ Paper packets or worksheets, which could be distributed daily by bus route or collected several times a week at a central location

- ▪ Textbooks
- ▪ Telephone instruction
- ▪ Online resources (take into account availability of broadband)
- ▪ instruction via the school's learning management system (LMS)
    - o This can also include platforms such as Skype, face time, and Zoom.
    - o Districts will need to address translation needs for students and families when developing and providing instructional materials.
- How do we implement a distance learning model during COVID-19 school closures for students who have IEPs with transition related activities in the community?
    - o As part of the planning process, IEPs with transition related activities in the community will need to be amended to reflect the distance learning model. See also the OSEP Guidance
- How does this impact the district's responsibility for special education monitoring activities and associated timelines?
    - o If your district has a scheduled program monitoring visit during the district closure, MDE staff will contact you to determine how to complete monitoring activities.
- How does this impact any pending special education dispute resolution mediations, facilitated IEP meetings, complaints and due process hearings in my district?
    - o During your planning for school district closure, please send emails to Karen Reiter at Karen.reiter@state.mn.us in the MDE Division of Compliance and Assistance to discuss options.
- Can a school staff member ask if the parent has recently traveled out of the country prior to providing services in the student's home?
    - o See the Office of Special Education memo, question B2. This is a question best addressed by the local school district in consultation with the Minnesota Department of Health and their guidelines.
- What is the district's obligation for due process meetings (annual reviews, initial IEP, reevaluations)?
    - o IEP teams are allowed to meet virtually to complete due process activities. Districts and charters could also move forward with assessments and evaluation available online. For activities that are not reasonable to carry out if a school is closed or a student is ill, those activities could be delayed until the district is reopened.
- Will there be any special education funding impacts?
    - o All requests for reimbursement will be evaluated on a case-by-case basis. But generally, special education and related services provided under an IEP through distance learning should be reimbursable. For further questions regarding state and federal streams of funding, contact mde.sped@state.mn.us.

For questions related to special education compliance, please contact Marikay Canaga Litzau at Marikay.litzau@state.mn.us

For all other special education questions for students with disabilities ages three through 21 please contact Robyn Widely at robyn.widley@state.mn.us.

For Part C information, please see the early learning/Part C section of this document. Please contact Lisa Backer for Part C questions at lisa.backer@state.mn.us.

English Learners

Provision of education for English learners is an important consideration when engaging in this planning. The school district remains responsible for educating English learners. Districts and charters must plan how they will continue to meet the requirements of English leaners' educational needs.

By law, students who are identified to receive English language development services must be provided supports that allow them access academic content. English learners must receive research based, appropriately resourced supports to access content, and districts may not withhold services based on characteristics such as immigration status. A brief overview of legal requirements for English language development services can be found in the U.S. Department of Education's Dear Colleague Letter regarding education for English learners. Immediate considerations for English learners include:

- Access to a reliable internet connection
- Communication with families that may not speak English as a primary language
- Ability of the student to understand and produce complex academic language for assignments without typical scaffolds
- Availability of scaffolding methods that are available in a distance learning environment

Ultimately, English learners need to have the chance to access grade level standards and still need some sort of support to access academic content.

Considerations for Supporting English Learners

- Do we still need to serve English learners?
  - o Yes. While distance learning is likely a new medium of instruction for many students and educators, the law is clear that students still need to be served. To the extent possible, that service should reflect the language proficiency levels of the students. In some cases, different service levels would boil down to the amount of time that students receive services from a licensed English language development teacher. We are aware that many English language development teachers serve students by co-teaching content classes with licensed content teachers. Collaboration between English language development teachers and academic content teachers is still encouraged. Regarding content instruction, English learners still need to have access to core content instruction from a teacher licensed in that content area, however that looks in your distance learning setting.
- What types of scaffolds can we provide to English learners?
  - o Educators should consider the options that may be available to them to provide access to content for English learners. Home language is an asset and should be utilized. Many online learning resources, such as Khan Academy, provide videos in Spanish, French, and Portuguese. While these translations certainly wouldn't help many English learners in Minnesota, and it certainly wouldn't substitute for core content instruction, it is the type of resource that educators should consider using. We urge caution when using it because it certainly doesn't always provide accurate

translations, but Google Translate is a resource that should be considered to aid students. However, we emphasize that this is a tool and is not a substitute for English language development services and shouldn't be used absent from other attempts to scaffold instruction. Teachers should also consider using online platforms such as Google Hangouts and Zoom—which has been made free for educators during this pandemic—to provide small group instruction to students provided that students have access to devices and a reliable internet connection.

- What if students are not able to finish ACCESS testing?
  - This issue is addressed in the [assessment section](#) of this document.
- How should we reach out to the parents of students receiving English language development services and multilingual parents in general during the COVID-19 pandemic?
  - Districts will need to consider a variety of ways to reach out to families that do not use English as a primary language. Multilingual staff have not only linguistic resources but also cultural capital that may allow them to be trusted messengers. They should be leveraged whenever possible. Districts should also consider multiple modes of communicating, such as by phone call, email, and social media in as many languages as they are able. Community assets should also be leveraged. Multilingual and multicultural leaders of community organizations and religious institutions that the community trusts should be tapped whenever possible to reach out to families that primarily speak a language other than English.
- Can the English language development teacher provide credit-bearing content instruction via distance learning if they don't have a license in the content area or if they are not collaborating with a licensed co-teacher?
  - No. This is the case during typical school instruction and this requirement does not go away in this situation.

Students Experiencing Homelessness or Housing Instability

Minnesota public and charter schools identified over 9,000 students experiencing homelessness enrolled on October 1, 2019, attending over 1,400 schools spanning 77 counties. Roughly double this number are expected to have been identified by the end of the school year. Due to the economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, the number of students facing homelessness could grow even further, particularly among families who today may be in a precarious housing situation, such as paying too much for rent and dependent on low-wage jobs that may also be impacted by the pandemic.

Students experiencing homelessness face unique barriers from school closings and to participating in distance learning, including limited availability of technology and living situations that do not support doing homework (e.g., in a car). Schools have critical responsibilities for the education of these students, and are also critical partners in the community-wide response to addressing the unique vulnerabilities of these students. Students experiencing homelessness are disproportionately students of color, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or queer (LGBTQ), and/or students with disabilities, meaning that a robust plan for meeting the needs of these students is also a critical equity issue to ensure that all Minnesota students can participate fully in distance learning.

Every school and school district's distance learning plan should specify how it will satisfy the Federal requirements of the [McKinney-Vento Homeless Education Assistance Improvements Act of 2001](#), as amended by

the Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015, to support homelessness students throughout this crisis and promote their full participation in their education throughout the duration of the distance learning period.

During the planning period, schools and school districts should:

- Understand the [legal requirements for districts](#) to support homeless students in having full access to education, which remain in full force and effect. In addition to MDE's [posted guidance for school districts on meeting these requirements](#), several technical assistance centers and associations also have guides for implementing these requirements, including the [National Center on Homeless Education](#), the [National Association for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth](#), and [SchoolHouse Connection](#).
- Designate key staff who will coordinate homeless-specific responses at a district or school level. In addition to the Federally-mandated district-level homeless liaison role, schools with a high rate or large number of homeless students will benefit from having designated staff at a school-level for assessing, planning for, and responding to the needs of homeless students.
- Monitor evolving and emerging recommendations specifically pertaining to homeless students during the COVID-19 pandemic offered by [SchoolHouse Connection](#) and that may be available from other sources over time.
- Follow social media accounts of and subscribe to the mailing lists for organizations that will consolidate and disseminate recommendations and resources to support homeless students throughout the pandemic, including the National Center on Homeless Education, the National Association for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth, and SchoolHouse Connection.
- Assess the living situations and other characteristics of students flagged as experiencing homelessness in their student record to help triage where the greatest support will be needed for these students to fully participate in distance learning. For example, students who are presently unsheltered or staying somewhere not meant for habitation may have a more difficult time participating in distance learning than students who are staying in an emergency shelter that is equipped with internet access.
- Develop, implement, and distribute an assessment of each student's needs related to distance learning that does not presume that students have stable or consistent housing. This assessment should be easy for parents or guardians to complete and guide them to resources to help meet basic requirements for participation in distance learning (e.g., a consistent place to do homework that allows students to concentrate).
- Determine how existing or alternative transportation options could be deployed to meet basic student needs that would normally be met at school, such as delivery of meals, educational materials, or other resources.
- Develop expectations for distance learning that do not require access to specific technology, including computers, telephones, or internet, and that specifies options for students who do not have access to these things.
- Engage your local shelters or other locations where students experiencing homelessness may be concentrated (e.g., emergency shelters, domestic violence shelters, drop-in centers for homeless youth, etc.) to help strengthen their ability to support students' participation in distance learning. This could include, for example, loaning computers from a school computer lab to a location where students could use them within a shelter to do their homework.

- Engage your [local public health departments](#), [county or Tribal human services departments](#), and [Continuum of Care region](#) on planning efforts to meet the needs of homeless students throughout the pandemic. With these local partners, develop protocols for how schools would identify and meet the needs of students experiencing homelessness in ways that are consistent with [protecting student privacy](#), including the special provisions that apply in emergencies.
- Engage your local libraries to assess their ability to help support students success with distance learning, including study spaces, computer access, and access to instructional materials.
- Establish a hotline for students who may have difficulties participating in distance learning to use in connecting with school personnel who can help troubleshoot or identify options, ideally with the option to allow text messaging in addition to telephone calls.
- Anticipate increased student support needs related to anxiety and trauma related to the pandemic.

Throughout the distance learning period, schools and school districts should:

- Implement expectations for distance learning that do not require students to check in or report attendance over video or audio connections, which may be infeasible in the setting where a student is located.
- Encourage students and parents to reach out if their living situation changes and to access additional support to promote every student's ability to participate in distance learning.
- Monitor participation and engagement of homeless students in distance learning (e.g., including both attendance and performance) as a distinct group, to help guide whether additional staff support, engagement, or assistance are needed for students experiencing homelessness.
- Schedule leadership-level reviews of the efficacy of distance learning plans and approaches for homeless students, and consider alternatives or additional support needs as part of that review.
- Monitor emerging guidance or recommendations on supporting homeless students and implement changes as appropriate.
- Maintain regular contact with [local public health departments](#), [county or Tribal human services departments](#), and [Continuum of Care planning bodies](#) on ongoing or emerging needs and to connect to resources that can assist students and families experiencing homelessness.

Early Learning

School-based early care and education programs such as voluntary prekindergarten and school readiness plus are expected to be included in your district's distance learning plan.

Voluntary Prekindergarten and School Readiness Plus

Through the implementation of age-appropriate distance learning activities, programs will be expected to meet minimum hour requirements excluding the instructional hours that would have occurred during the ten day planning period. Read the [guidance on creating a distance learning plan for prekindergarten](#) children.

School Readiness, Early Childhood Family Education Programming

Community Education programs such as Early Childhood Family Education and School Readiness will not be required to be included in your district's distance learning plan whether these programs are included in the plan can be a locally determined decision.

Health and Developmental Screening

At this time, programs offering Health and Developmental Screening may postpose services and work with MDE to extend deadlines if needed.

Early Childhood Special Education

Please see section on *Special Education Services – IEP and 504* for guidance.

Head Start Program

Head Start programs are to follow recommendations from their local health officials and Health Service Advisory Councils. Program must inform MDE and the Regional Office with program changes. The federal Office of Head Start has provided additional guidance.

Early Learning Scholarships Program

MDE will ensure children and programs who receive early learning scholarships will continue being served and funded. Please see guidance below.

- Families impacted directly by COVID-19 test results, school closures or quarantined parameters may use the Medical Exemption form to be exempted from the 25 maximum absent day limit. As access to medical personnel might be limited to prevent further exposure, Area Administrators and Pathway II Scholarship Administrators may accept verbal evidence that the child is in a family and household subject to the MDH recommendations. The administrator will make a referral to MDH and then notify MDE.
- Programs will have days waived for the duration of the school closure. Programs receiving Pathway II funds can continue to request payment for each slot.
- As funds allow, a child's scholarship temporarily may be increased if the program regularly attended is required to close, and the child is able to attend another eligible program. This will reduce the risk of the first program losing revenue and the family losing funds from their scholarship if used at a program they are no longer able to attend due to closure. This would allow families to have more than $7,500 for the current scholarship year.
- Programs that follow local school district or municipality closure guidelines may request to be included in the above parameters.

Additional Information

Guidance/Resources to Support At Home Learning and Discovery:

- MDE parent guides with activities that are aligned with the ECIPS. The parent guides are available at: https://education.mn.gov/MDE/dse/early/ind/ (scroll to the bottom of the page under "Translated Documents")
- Help Me Grow at http://helpmegrowmn.org/HMG/HelpfulRes/EncourageHealthDev/index.html
- Family activities under STEM video series from ZERO TO THREE (ZTT) at: https://www.zerotothree.org/resources/series/let-s-talk-about-stem-video-series
- The Zero To Three article on talking to young children about Coronavirus might be of interest: https://www.zerotothree.org/resources/3210-tips-for-families-talking-about-the-coronavirus and https://www.zerotothree.org/resources/3211-why-are-people-wearing-masks-why-are-people-covering-their-faces
- Scholastic *Learn at Home* provides 20 days' worth of active learning journeys designed to reinforce and sustain educational opportunities for those students who are unable to attend school.
- Screen Sense, a set of research-based materials from Zero to Three
- Including the E-AIMS model for choosing media content for children
- NAEYC's Position Statement with the Fred Rogers Center, on Young Children and Technology
- Recognizing the importance of quality, developmentally appropriate content and of co-viewing and joint media engagement with parents/adults/family members
- The U.S. Department of Education's Early Learning and Educational Technology policy brief (which is based in part on recommendations from the American Academy of Pediatrics, NAEYC, and others)
- Award-winners in the Excellence in Early Learning Digital Media category developed by the Association for Library Service to Children (a branch of the American Library Association)

Assessment

The ACCESS/Alt ACCESS window closes March 20. The spring testing window for MCA/MTAS window opened on March 2 and will end on May 1 for Reading and Math, and May 8 for MCA Science. Contact mde.testing@state.mn.us for further questions.

Schools and districts should consider how best health practices can be implemented while administering assessments.

Q-and-A on state assessments:

- Can testing take place during a distance learning day?
  - No, statewide tests (e.g., MCA) must be administered in a standardized manner and environment. The school or district is responsible for the security of any test materials and ensuring that the tests are administered in accordance with all policies and procedures outlined in the Procedures Manual and related resources.
- Will the testing window be extended?

- o In these extraordinary times it is critical to maintain focus on the purpose of schools and districts – educating all students. The preparation time in schools and districts must concentrate on providing services for students and ensuring all students are prepared for career or college. While test scores are a valuable measure of the state's and school's or district's ability to deliver instruction aligned to Minnesota's Academic Standards, administering these tests this year cannot detract from providing instruction to students in light of the unprecedented times. Focusing on the overall health and wellbeing of all Minnesotans is important. Therefore the testing windows will not be modified or extended.
- What should schools do with materials currently located in schools?
  - o Statewide assessment materials must remain secure. ACCESS and Alternate ACCESS materials should be returned by the published dates. MCA and MTAS materials must be kept secure and remain available for use when students return to the school building. School and district staff should follow established procedures for returning materials.
- What if students cannot/are unable to test?
  - o If that moment should arise, the Minnesota Department of Education would consider seeking a targeted one-year waiver of the assessment requirements from the U.S. Department of Education for those schools impacted by the extraordinary circumstances. https://oese.ed.gov/files/2020/03/COVID-19-OESE-FINAL-3.12.20.pdf
    - ▪ Please note that States with Education Flexibility (Ed-Flex) program authority are not authorized to waive statutory or regulatory requirements related to standards, assessments, and accountability under section 1111 of the ESEA. The Department may, however, consider such waivers under the section 8401 waiver authority.
- What are the implications for a student, school, or district not able to take statewide assessments?
  - o MDE is aware that there will be several programs and systems impacted if sufficient statewide assessment data is not available (e.g., English Learner exit criteria, Literacy Aid). MDE will be using March 16-27 to identify all of those impacted as well as develop options. We will be sharing those plans as they become available.

Q-and-A on other assessments:

- What information or resources are available related to Advanced Placement (AP) testing?
  - o College Board coordinates Advanced Placement (AP) and SAT exams https://pages.collegeboard.org/natural-disasters
- What information or resources are available related to International Baccalaureate (IB) Organization testing?
  - o International Baccalaureate Organization addresses coursework deadlines, completing assessments, examinations, authorization and evaluations https://www.ibo.org/news/news-about-the-ib/covid-19-coronavirus-updates/
- What information or resources are available related to ACT testing?
  - o https://www.act.org/

Before and After Care

MDE strongly recommends that all districts and charters send communication to families and the community regarding the continuity of any before- and after-care programs with which the district works.

Communication

MDE will communicate with superintendents and school leaders via GovDelivery.

In communicating with families, your community, community partners* and local media, keep in mind the following:

- When and how to expect communication from the district
- Where they can find the distance learning plan on your website (must be posted on website before distance learning begins)
- What is the structure of distance learning in your district?
- When will educators and school leaders be available and how can they be reached?
- How will students be able to retrieve their belongings from school (from lockers, etc.)?
- Student expectations (attendance, assignments, hours, due dates, etc.)
- Reminder about Student Information System and how to sign up
- How to access meals
- How to access telehealth
- How to access best practices around health from MDH

*Community partners often include (but not limited to): first-responders, local government, elected officials, nonprofit organizations, libraries, businesses, child care centers, associations

Language Access

Every family deserves access to the information provided by their district or charter school. Language translations and interpretations of this information should be made available as quickly as possible.

Contracted Services

When communicating with contracted service providers, consider what aspects of your regular service will be changing (school lunch menu, busing services, etc.)

Communication to Staff:

- Expectations on how they will report their attendance
- Expectations around staff presence at each building

Tribal Considerations

As you are making decisions, please ensure you are coordinating with local and regional Tribal leaders. Tribal Governments are sovereign nations, and they maintain a unique political status. Each will be making decisions based on what is best for their citizenry. Be aware of how school closures may impact Tribal communities and Tribal governments. This school closure plan provides unique opportunities to the state, school districts, schools, and local governmental agencies to meet the needs of all Minnesotan at this time.

School districts should consult with local Tribal leaders, city and county governmental agencies, volunteer organizations and private sector companies to ascertain how students' needs will be identified and met. This may include resource distribution, mental health needs, and educational opportunities in your communities. These considerations offer the opportunity to ensure that parents, families and Tribal Nations are meaningfully engaged in solutions and the implementation of services for our students and for all Minnesotans.

For assistance, work with your Indian Home School Liaison, Indian Education staff, and parent committee. Contact MDE's Office of Indian Education for a list of Tribal Education Directors.

Broadband Access

If broadband access is an issue for households in your school district, here are links to resources and options that may be available in your area.

- Contact your local broadband provider(s):
  - List of broadband providers by county (with contact information): https://mn.gov/deed/programs-services/broadband/maps/data.jsp
  - For help identifying providers in your area:
    - Minnesota Cable Communications Association: 651-493-0716
    - Minnesota Telecom Alliance: 651-288-3723
    - Satellite Industry Association: 202-503-1560
    - Wireless Infrastructure Association: 703-739-0300
    - WISPA (fixed wireless providers): 407-319-0062
- Companies with service options related to COVID-19 response. Note this is not a comprehensive list. Visit the Office of Broadband Development for updates and additions to this list.
  - AT&T
  - CenturyLink
  - Comcast
  - Charter
  - Mediacom
  - Sprint
  - T-Mobile
  - Verizon
- Minnesota Office of Broadband Development
  - For assistance identifying broadband service options or connecting with broadband providers, please call or email:

- 651-259-7610
- Deed.broadband@state.mn.us
  - K12 Connect Forward Program: https://mn.gov/deed/programs-services/broadband/connect-forward/

Libraries

The American Library Association reiterates the valuable role of libraries in combatting misinformation and providing equitable access to information during this evolving crisis. The Minnesota Department of Education encourages library leaders to review the information provided in order to make informed decisions. Closing a library is a local decision made by cities, counties and/or regional public library systems. Scheduled library programs and bookmobile service may be cancelled and meeting rooms may be closed while the library building remains open. In its capacity of offering guidance to public libraries, MDE has several suggestions for libraries that choose to remain open during this exceptional and difficult time for our communities.

Public libraries, like public schools, play an important role for youth in communities and often serve as a refuge, and we recognize that any closures can have a ripple effect on families and the community at large. As community anchor institutions, libraries have the tools and resources that allow people to stay connected and students to engage in learning. We encourage public libraries to consider how they can safely help to foster learning spaces for students during this time.

To care for staff:
- Follow guidelines from the Minnesota Department of Health and Centers for Disease Control related to quarantining, surface cleaning and social distance, including increased use of maintenance protocols.
- Remind employees to wash their hands frequently, and provide hand sanitizer throughout your facility. Wipe down all counter tops and other surfaces frequently with sterilizing wipes.
- Train volunteers and staff to limit physical contact with visitors. Remind staff or volunteers to stay home if they have any signs of illness.
- If possible, take steps now to prepare your staff for remote work if a closure is ordered, and ensure you have an emergency communication system.

To serve patrons:
- Partner with district or charter schools to better understand the educational needs of students and to ensure your needs understood.
- Consider keeping Wi-Fi open 24/7 to support people without home access.
- Consider increasing bandwidth to support additional online use.
- Remove fines for late materials.
- Consider deploying mobile hotspots to libraries in areas of the state that have insufficient home internet access. Contact the MN Office of Broadband to identify locations, and use Minitex (if open) for delivery.
- As space permits, move computers from closed lab spaces to open areas that allow for social distancing.

Children and families will find:

- On site computers, the internet and Wi-Fi. Some may have computers that can be checked out for home use.
- Free access to books, DVDs and other materials in languages other than English.
- Educational and recreational materials, in print and online (also available from home)
    - Books
    - Magazines
    - Streaming video
    - DVDs
    - Music
    - Newspapers
- Wi-Fi Hotspots may be available to check out for home use.
- Staff that support learning and equitable access to information. You may also find staff that are fluent in languages other than English.

Online and from home, visit eLibrary Minnesota for a wide range of free resources that support learning. Review what's available:
- K-12 Student resources (Elementary, Middle School, High School)
- eBooks Minnesota (especially elementary age and a selection in languages other than English)
- Your local library may have additional online resources available.

For Districts and Schools

- Public libraries may be able to serve as locations for food or instructional materials pick up.
- All 355 public library locations offer access to the internet and 99% have Wi-Fi available.
- There is at least one library location in each of Minnesota's 87 counties.
- Consider deploying non instructional staff to help out at libraries that serve your students.
- Encourage teachers and students to use free online resources like eLibrary Minnesota and eBooks Minnesota to complement instructional materials.
- Consider temporarily moving school library collections or computers to public libraries as space is available.

Many libraries have play spaces or special areas where young children congregate. You may want to take extra precautions with cleaning during this time.

Library Cleaning Guides & Resources

- Centers for Disease Control. Cleaning recommendations from the CDC
- National Association for the Education of Young Children. Cleaning, Sanitizing, and Disinfection Frequency Table
- Environmental Protection Agency. Green Cleaning Toolkit for Early Care and Education
- American Academy of Pediatrics. Cleaners, Sanitizers & Disinfectants
- Association of Library Services to Children. Best Practices for Cleaning Play and Learn Spaces

- National Network of Libraries of Medicine. Greater Midwest Region. [Resources related to COVID-19 for public libraries](#).
- National Library of Medicine. [Coronavirus: Library and Business Operations Planning](#)

Activities

All in-person school-sponsored activities that are scheduled during the statewide school closure are suspended until in-person school resumes.

Staff

During your planning week, provide training to staff (including: classroom teachers, paraprofessionals, administrators, school support staff) on distance learning practices.

Consider how you will utilize staff in a virtual way: can calls be forwarded during school hours?

Because districts and charters will be receiving full funding for providing distance learning, it is expected that all staff, including non-salaried, hourly staff, will earn pay and benefits as planned in the school budget and bargaining agreements. Likewise, if calendars are extended to accommodate school reopening, districts and charters are expected to provide full pay and benefits for that period as well as they will be receiving full funding.

Funding

MDE's Emergency Operations Plan includes provisions for ensuring ongoing payments and other school district supports in the event of emergency situations such as a widespread infectious disease outbreak. Regularly scheduled cash outflows to districts will not be disrupted due to an infectious disease outbreak closure. Aid payments are not expected to change due to the loss of instructional days. General education revenue will be calculated as if students received instruction on those days. Federal payments are made through the SERVS system on a draw/reimbursement basis. To the extent that expenses are incurred during this period, draw requests will be processed on a weekly basis according to the normal schedule. No disruption to SERVS payments are anticipated.

If your district has an Emergency Operation Plan, you should promptly familiarize yourself with its procedures to make certain your district can continue performing its essential functions if its leadership and key staff are unable to perform their duties due to closure. Your Emergency Operations Plan and other planning should include provisions to ensure your payroll processes will continue.

Be mindful of vendors who are seeking to take advantage of this crisis. If it seems too good to be true, it is. If you suspect a vendor is fraudulent, please [notify the Minnesota Attorney General's office](#).

Employment and Workforce

The Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development is developing guidance on how to mitigate impacts of school closure on family employment and community economic impact, particularly for parents and families in the healthcare industry.

Resources from the Minnesota Department of Health

- Distance learning: Clean devices (iPads, laptops) that you touch frequently like you do for all high use areas in homes
- Social distancing practices still apply (avoid large gatherings of 250+, if under 250 participants maintain 6 feet of distance)
- Discourage from gathering in other public places while school is dismissed.
- Resources to help understand COVID-19 and steps you can take to protect yourself and your family:
  - CDC's health communication resources
  - CDC information on stigma and COVID-19
  - CDC information on COVID-19 and children
  - CDC offers several free handwashing resources that include health promotion materials, information on proper handwashing technique, and tips for families to help children develop good handwashing habits.
  - Other health and education professional organizations may also have helpful resources your school can use or share, such as the American Academy of Pediatrics
  - CDC's information on helping children cope with emergencies
  - Stigma prevention and facts about COVID-19
  - Minnesota Department of Health COVID-19 website

Contact Information

- For general questions about COVID-19, please email the Minnesota Department of Health or call their hotline at 651-201-3920.
- For general education questions, use MDEs COVID-19 general email: COVID-19.Questions.MDE@state.mn.us
- For specific questions about online and distance learning, please contact jeff.plaman@state.mn.us
- For specific questions about school meal programs, please contact monica.herrera@state.mn.us
- For specific questions about special education, please contact robyn.widley@state.mn.us
- For specific questions about civil rights compliance, please contact marikay.litzau@state.mn.us
- For relevant guidance regarding how schools can protect civil rights during an outbreak, see the U.S. DoE Office for Civil Rights Fact Sheet released during the 2014 Ebola outbreak.
- For specific questions about state assessments, please contact mde.testing@state.mn.us