



NORTH DAKOTA DEPARTMENT OF
PUBLIC INSTRUCTION

SCHOOL CLOSURE GUIDANCE FOR PUBLIC SCHOOL DISTRICTS AND NON-PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Process Toolkit

Guidance for school and district leaders to develop short-term and long-term plans during COVID-19 school closure.

March 17, 2020

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Process Flowchart

On March 15th, as a result of the COVID-19 global pandemic, Governor Burgum implemented an executive order calling for all public and non-public K-12 schools in North Dakota to close for the week of March 16-20. During this time, Governor Burgum has asked for district and school leaders to develop plans focused on reopening as well as how to educate in the event of an extended closure. The NDDPI is providing this document as a toolkit and guidance for district and school leaders to develop both short-term and long-term plans.

Objective:

Transition students back into an education environment.

Decision-Making Considerations

1. Identify essential staff and planning teams.
2. Create a transparent communication strategy.
3. Consult all [NDDPI](#), [DOH](#), etc., guidance and your District Emergency Operation Plan.

Soft Closure (First 5 Days)

STUDENT SAFETY

Focus Planning: Special Education needs, Child Nutrition

- How do we ensure the physical, mental, emotional well-being of ALL students?
- How will students get fed?
- How will all students be treated equitably?
- How will staff and students be transitioned back to school?
- How will the school be sanitized?
- What is the plan for when a case of COVID-19 is confirmed within your community?

Focus on 3 Levels of Closure

1. Soft Closure
2. Full Closure
3. Extended Closure

Extended Closure: Academic Planning

Focus Planning: Focus Planning: Alternate forms of learning, Special Education Needs, Child Nutrition

- Provide free digital resources.
- Decide on an academic make-up plan.
- If you need to make up hours, consult [guidance](#) on how many hours needed to make up time lost. (LINK)
- Create a virtual learning plan.
- Consider that each course, content, and grade level have unique needs that need to be addressed prior to deciding on a virtual learning mandate.

Full Closure

Focus Planning: Alternate forms of learning, Special Education Needs, Child Nutrition

- Continue to consider all student safety expectations.
- Who is expected to report to work?
- Do all staff have an assigned role?
 - What is reasonable to expect regarding student learning expectations and staff resources?
 - What staff professional development is needed?
- Do you have an internal staff human resources policy for sick leave and flexible work environments?

Emergency Planning Process

1. Form a collaborative planning team
2. Understand the situation
 - a. Conduct research
 - b. Analyze the information
3. Determine goals and objectives
4. Plan development
 - a. Develop and analyze courses of action
 - b. Identify resources
5. Plan preparation, review, and approval
 - a. Write the plan
 - b. Approve and implement the plan
6. Plan implementation and maintenance
 - a. Exercise the plan and evaluate its effectiveness
 - b. Review, revise, and maintain the plan

Core Concepts of the Planning Process

Form a collaborative planning team: Get input from all stakeholders, i.e. school administration, teachers, nutrition, custodial, maintenance, transportation, etc. This ensures all viewpoints are considered, consensus is achieved, and important information is not overlooked.

Understand the situation: Identify threats and hazards and assess risks. This helps identify the vulnerabilities and analyze the potential consequences of these threats. Consider the resources available (plans, equipment, finances, personnel), local geography and topography which may influence the situation.

Determine goals and objectives: Base goals on needs to and recovering from hazards; hazard, response, and constraint generated demands. Then restate needs and demands as: 1) operational priority; 2) response goal; 3) intermediate objectives.

Plan Development: Develop and analyze courses of action and identify resources. Planning concepts for developing a course of action: Scenario based analyzes impact of a scenario; Functional identifies the common tasks performed during emergencies; Capabilities based focuses on capacity to take a course of action. Develop a plan for the following three assumptions: 1) best case; 2) worst case; 3) most realistic.

Plan preparation, review, and approval: Develop a plan based on course of action strategies. Allow for a review process by all entities with responsibilities (time permitting). Basic rules: Keep it simple; avoid jargon and acronyms; use short sentences; provide detail without speculation; format the plan for ease of use. Once approval is achieved from the proper authorities, disseminate the plan to everyone who needs it.

Plan implementation and maintenance: Train and exercise the plan, then evaluate its effectiveness (time permitting). The plan is a living document, it requires regular review, revision, and maintenance.

K-12 Leaders,

Virtual Learning Guidance

The situation with the COVID-19 virus and its impact on ND K12 education continues to evolve on a nearly hourly basis. The North Dakota Department of Public Instruction (NDDPI) would like to share the following guidance regarding distance learning.

Most districts are not prepared to implement a distance learning model, such as online learning, on short notice. Some districts and schools may be in a position to continue teaching using distance learning methods through the [North Dakota Center for Distance Education \(NDCDE\)](#); however, **equity is a critical consideration**. It is important to note that if educational services are being delivered to students in any form, in order for the district to remain open, those services must be provided to **all** students, including students who don't have access to technology at home and students receiving special education services.

For the purposes of this memo, virtual, online and distance learning all mean school that is offered through a digital platform rather than on-campus. As is always the case, local school leaders have decision-making powers regarding curriculum and instruction. However, consider these important factors as you explore virtual learning and online platforms.

1. Ensuring Equitable Services
 - a. Do all students have access to a device?
 - b. Do all students have access to reliable, high-speed internet?
 - c. Do all classes/courses have the ability to provide instruction?
 - d. Have teachers considered students' Individualized Educational Plans (IEPs)?
 - i. See <https://sites.ed.gov/idea/idea-files/q-and-a-providing-services-to-children-with-disabilities-during-the-coronavirus-disease-2019-outbreak/> for more information regarding Special Education.
 - ii. Most importantly, all educational decisions for students with IEPs must be made on an individual basis and consistent with the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and the North Dakota Department of Instruction's Office of Special Education guidelines.
2. Providing High-Quality, Effective, Standards-Based Education
 - a. Is the virtual learning experience of high quality?
 - b. Does the content align to North Dakota Content Standards?
 - c. Does the technology platform allow access to an educator?
 - d. Do you have a mechanism in place for assessing students and assigning "grades"?

There is a difference between offering students the *option* of accessing free digital learning experiences to students and requiring/mandating all students attend a virtual "school". Please ensure the answer to all the above questions is "yes" before requiring/mandating students to attend any virtual school. **If a school decides to offer virtual learning to all students, schools will need to submit a plan to the NDDPI, who will then forward the plan to Governor Burgum for final approval. Further guidance will be released about this process soon.**

In addition, if a school provides virtual learning opportunities during this time, schools must also continue to provide school counseling services, even if this is done electronically. Please see the linked guidance from the American School Counselor Association relating to [virtual school counseling during an emergency shutdown](#). School counselors still must follow all [ASCA Ethical Standards for School Counselors](#). School counselors should also work collaboratively with all stakeholders to ensure equity,

access and success of all students whether virtual school counseling is offered synchronously or asynchronously. Click on this link to access [ASCA's position statement on virtual school counseling](#).

School districts can contact EduTech at help@k12.nd.us for assistance with training and consulting on Office 365 and other distance learning platforms at no cost, if this is an option you would like to entertain.

If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to call Amanda Peterson, Assistant Director of Academic Support at (701) 328-3545 or email at amandapeterson@nd.gov or Joe Kolosky, Director of School Approval and Opportunity at jkolosy@nd.gov.

School Guidance

Health officials are currently taking steps to prevent the introduction and spread of novel coronavirus disease (COVID-19) into communities across the United States. Schools will undoubtedly play an important role in this effort. Through collaboration and coordination with local health departments, schools can take steps to disseminate information about the disease and its potential transmission within their school community. Schools can prepare to take steps to prevent the spread of COVID-19 among their students and staff. The NDDPI provides the following information to help answer any questions that may arise.

School Closure Q & A

On March 15, Gov. Doug Burgum and State Supt. Kirsten Baesler had a conference call with all North Dakota school superintendents. There was a 45-minute [Q & A session](#) available online.

If you have additional questions, please email [Kirsten Baesler](#).

Making Up School Hours

NDCC 15.1-06-04. School calendar – Length, indicates a school district shall provide for a school calendar including: At least 962.5 hours of instruction for elementary school students and 1,050 hours of instruction for middle and high school students.

If a school must close for an extended period because of a quarantine and should fall below the minimum hours, the following options are available:

- Making up the hours on planned Professional Development (PD) days, if the mandatory three PD days are already met;
- Making up school time on Saturdays;
- Extending the school day; or
- Extending the school year.

Student Attendance

Many districts, parents, and guardians have expressed worry about student absences related to COVID-19 safety concerns. Many parents in North Dakota are considering keeping their children home to protect them from contracting COVID-19. Questions have arisen regarding if a parent can keep their child home for an extended period, and if there will be a consequence if they do. In these cases, parents have the ultimate decision-making authority regarding their children. School board members and administrators are encouraged to look at their current attendance and contagious disease policies and make the most logical and practical decision. Districts should keep student safety and wellbeing at the forefront when making any decision impacting student learning. Districts should also review any student attendance

incentive practice or procedure they have in place which might encourage a student to come to school when they are ill.

Assessment and Accountability

The U.S. Department of Education (USED) has provided information to state education agencies regarding possible flexibility for assessments and accountability as a result of COVID-19 on a case-by-case basis. Should the need arise, the NDDPI will work with districts on adjustments related to state assessments scheduled this spring.

Notifications

If districts experience school closures, it is the NDDPI's expectation they follow their standard procedure for notifying parents and guardians. This includes, but is not limited to calls, emails, updates to their district websites, text messages, and contacting local news stations. If parents and families do not hear from their districts regarding a closure, they should contact their school principal or district superintendent.

State Aid Reimbursement

In the event of an emergency and a school falls below the minimum number of hours required by law, schools can submit a waiver for state aid reimbursement payments.

NDCC 15.1-27-23. Weather or other emergency conditions - Closure of schools - State aid payments to school districts, reads:

1. The board of each school district shall establish the length of a period, day, and week in accordance with the requirements of section 15.1-06-04. If a public school or school district is closed or provides less than a full day of instruction, the public school or school district shall reschedule those hours to ensure students receive at least the minimum number of instructional hours required by subdivision a of subsection 1 of section 15.1-06-04.
2. Any public school or school district for which the rescheduling of classes would create undue hardship may request, for purposes of calculating state aid payments to the school district, the governor waive the rescheduling in whole or in part.

You can access the [waiver](#) on our website.

Special Education Guidance on Providing Services to Children with Disabilities During COVID-19

The programs and services determined by an Individualized Education Program (IEP) team and written into an IEP are written for one calendar year, per the approved school district calendar.

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 must plan how they will continue to meet the requirements of Part B (3-21) of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Please consider the following:

1. **If school is closed** due to either Local Education Agency (LEA) or governor action and the LEA does not provide services for its students, then the LEA is not required to provide services for students with IEPs. All students will be expected to resume attendance at the conclusion of the closure. Students with an IEP will resume their regularly scheduled programs and services upon return. There

may be circumstances where an IEP team needs to consider, on an individual basis, whether there is a need for compensatory education.

2. If school is open, the following guidance applies if:

- a. individual students with an IEP are absent for 10 consecutive school days or less, the provision of services to the extent available is not considered a change of placement;
- b. absence is likely to be more than 10 consecutive school days, the IEP team must consider change of placement decisions on an individual basis;
- c. parent chooses to keep a student with an IEP home for precautionary measures, the district is not obligated to provide homebound services or consider the need for compensatory education. This decision must be based on the individual needs of the child and not on perceptions of the child's needs based on generalizations regarding his or her disability. The school district would be advised to send a prior written notice to document the parent's decision to not access services;
- d. parent requests the district not provide services to a homebound student due to health and safety concerns, the student is considered absent and the district is not required to make up services;
- e. district determines, for health and safety reasons, staff will not provide homebound services during the public health emergency, the district must hold an IEP meeting and determine what, and if any, services must be made up.

If a district excludes a student with an IEP who is at-risk of health complications, the exclusion may be considered a change of placement. (OSERS March 2020). The IEP team should consider reconvening to discuss alternative provision of services (virtual instruction, instructional telephone calls, other curriculum based instructional activities, and/or homebound instruction).

3. If school is closed, and all students are provided an opportunity to learn from a distance:

- a) Under the IDEA, every student with an IEP is entitled to receive a free appropriate public education (FAPE), which includes specially designed instruction based on a student's unique needs designed to ensure the student makes progress in the general curriculum and toward meeting IEP goals. *34 C.F.R. §§300.39 and 300.320*. Please consider the following:
 - a. 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.
 - i. IEP's must continue to be implemented.
 - ii. 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.
 - b. 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.
 - i. Consider what other IEP team members, 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.
 - ii. Review the delivery of special education and related services, as well as general education curriculum, to ensure students with disabilities have equal access to distance learning. This includes children ages 3 through age 21. This will necessitate communication between the case manager,

administrator(s), the general education teachers, the parent/guardian and related services providers to ensure students with disabilities can be appropriately involved and make progress toward the general education standards and IEP goals.

- iii. Districts will need to address translation and interpreter needs for students and families when developing and providing instructional materials.
 - c. Consider the use of hot spots and free internet services being offered by internet companies for the delivery of instruction and for IEP and related services.
- b) Districts must consider the technology needs of each student with an IEP in order to provide access to regular and special education services. If additional technology is needed for a student to receive FAPE, it must be provided by the school, at no charge to the student. (34 C.F.R. §300.105). Creating a contingency plan for public health emergency gives the child's service providers and the child's parents an opportunity to reach agreement as to what circumstances could trigger the use of the distance learning plan and the services provided.
- c) Upon return to normal school operations, each IEP team for students with an IEP must review the provision of FAPE during the period of distance learning, to determine whether compensatory services are warranted in any service area, including instruction and/or any individual therapies. (OSERS March 2020).

4. Evaluation and IEP Timelines:

- a. Initial Evaluation: In ND, the 60-day timeline for initial evaluation continues to be in effect and every attempt should be made to complete the evaluation to the greatest extent possible. Reasons for not meeting this timeline must be clearly documented in a Prior Written Notice. If, because of exceptional circumstances, you will not meet the 60-calendar day timeline, you must clearly state the exceptional circumstance, the timeline for completing the evaluation, and must present parents with their procedural safeguards if they are disputing the rationale.
- b. Re-evaluation: The IDEA does not provide an evaluation timeline for re-evaluations other than the 3-year re-evaluation timeline. If, because of exceptional circumstances, you will not meet the 3-year timeline, you must clearly state the exceptional circumstance, the timeline for completing the evaluation, and must present parents with their procedural safeguards if they are disputing the rationale. For re-evaluations due while students are attending a virtual instructional setting, cases should be treated on an individual basis; however, every attempt should be made to complete the re-evaluation to the extent possible.
- c. Initial IEP: Pursuant to 34 CFR §300.323(c), a meeting to develop an IEP for a child must be conducted within 30 days of a determination that the child needs special education and related services. As soon as possible following development of the IEP, special education and related services must be made available to the child in accordance with the child's IEP. If, because of exceptional circumstances, you will not meet the 30 day timeline, you must clearly state the exceptional circumstance, the timeline for completing the IEP, and must present parents with their procedural safeguards if they are disputing the rationale.
- d. Annual IEPs: The IDEA requires the child's IEP be reviewed periodically, but not less than annually, to determine whether the annual goals for the child are being achieved; and revise the IEP, as appropriate. When conducting IEP Team meetings and placement meetings, the IEP team may agree to use alternative means of meeting participation requirements. The determination must be made on a case-by-case basis, must include the parent and other required IEP team

members. This decision must be clearly documented in a Prior Written Notice. Parents must be presented their procedural safeguards.

- e. **Notice of Changes to IEP Without an IEP Team Meeting:** The parent of a child with a disability and the IEP team may agree not to convene an IEP Team meeting for the purposes of making program changes, and instead may amend or modify the child's current IEP. In addition, the IEP team may agree to use alternative means of meeting participation requirements, such as video conferences and conference calls. The determination must be made on a case-by-case basis, must include the parent and other required IEP team members and cannot be the only meeting format considered. This decision must be clearly documented in a Prior Written Notice.

All educational decisions for student with IEPs must be made on an individual basis and consistent with the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and the North Dakota Department of Public Instruction policy.

The Office of Special Education and Rehabilitation Services (OSERS) has recently created a webpage designed to provide information and resources for schools and school personnel regarding COVID-19 <https://www.ed.gov/coronavirus> . One of the resources released aligns with North Dakota's guidance above regarding the provision of services for students with disabilities during this public health emergency.

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?**
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?**
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. 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

Extended School Closures

If the district as extended school closures the district will remain responsible for the free appropriate public education (FAPE) of its students eligible for special education services with an individualized education program (IEP). Districts should be communicating with parents and guardians prior to, during, and after a school closure regarding their child's IEP services. After an extended closure, districts are responsible for reviewing how the closure impacted the delivery of special education and related services to students eligible for special education services. Please note, if a school closure causes educational services for all students to pause within a school or district, then the school/district is generally not required to provide services to the affected students eligible for special education services during that same period. The United States Education Department (USED) has formulated [new guidance](#) regarding students receiving special services.

Additional resources from the US Department of Education:

- OSEP resources: [COVID-19 information and resources page](#)

- Council of Administrators of Special Education: [Considerations for Special Education Administrators](#)
- United States Department of Education: [Q&A on Providing Services to Children with Disabilities During the Coronavirus](#)
- United States Department of Education: [Q&A on FERPA and Student Privacy with Coronavirus](#)
- Online Learning for Students with Disabilities: [Considerations for LEA Policies, Practices, and Procedures](#)

Nutrition

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

- **Do we HAVE to participate in providing meals?**
Governor Burgum's Executive Order 2020-04 directs districts to plan for continuity of food nutritional programs.
- **What are options for districts providing meals to students?**
The Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) is the primary meal program available to the schools. However, the program is available in low income areas only; schools that have 50% or more free and reduced-price students or located in a low-income census area.

The NDDPI has submitted a waiver to USDA requesting approval to allow all North Dakota schools to participate and receive reimbursement through the SFSP. In addition, U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) is working with Congress to provide reimbursement to all schools that closed due to COVID-19. Waiver approval and legislation are pending. Districts will be notified as soon as more information is available.

- **How do I know if I am eligible to participate in SFSP?**
Districts may also identify census eligible areas where meal distribution can be done. The USDA has a mapper districts can use to identify schools that would qualify based on census at the following link: <https://www.fns.usda.gov/areaeligibility>

Districts must contact The NDDPI Child Nutrition Office to sign up to participate in the SFSP. Contact Melissa Anderson at mdanderson@nd.gov.

- **What is the SFSP?**
The SFSP provides meals to children in low income areas during the summer when school meals are not available. The NDDPI has received a waiver from USDA to allow schools to offer the SFSP during unanticipated school closures, such as now.

Summer Food sites can operate as open programs, which means they can serve any children that show up for a meal. This includes children from other, non-eligible schools (or communities) and any children not enrolled in school (age 1 and older).

The SFSP serves children up to age 18 or older if receiving special education services. Meals are served free of charge and the meal requirements are much simpler than school lunch or breakfast. Eligible sites may claim 2 meals/day.

- **What food can I serve?**

The SFSP meal requirements are listed below. All required components must be served as a unitized meal.

Breakfast:

Milk	1 cup
Fruit or/Vegetable	½ cup or (full strength juice)
Grain	1 serving (no whole grain requirement)

Lunch:

Milk	1 cup
2 Fruit or/Vegetable	½ cup (or full-strength juice)
1 Grain	1 serving (no whole grain requirement)
Meat/MA	2 oz

- **Do I need to track the number of students taking a meal?**

A head count(tally) is all that is needed for SFSP meals. Be sure to count all meals distributed. A meal counting sheet is attached.

Reimbursement is only paid for meals distributed to children.

Schools that are not eligible for SFSP should manually track meals by individual student in the event they are reimbursed.

Do not use your electronic system

- **Can I use my USDA foods (commodities)?**

Yes, use your USDA foods.

- **Can I give out two meals at one time? Can I give out meals for multiple days?**

Yes, you can give out **BOTH** Breakfast and Lunch at one time. You may also choose to give out meals for multiple days.

- **Do I need to maintain a production record tracking the food served?**

Yes, you will need to maintain a production record listing the foods served and serving sizes just like the NSLP/SBP food program.

- **Can a parent pick up the meals for their children?**

Yes, a parent can take the meals for all children in the household.

- **Who do I contact at ND DPI Child Nutrition with questions?**

Contact Lynell Thueson at 1-888-338-3663 or 701-328-2294 and someone from the Child Nutrition office will assist you.

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 all necessary personnel are stationed to maximize student and staff safety and all distribution sites are supervised.

- Explore distribution strategies to 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 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 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 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 food be delivered to their residence. Schools should initiate plans with families prior to delivery. For meals, both breakfast and lunch can be delivered at once.

Behavioral Health

Talking to Children about COVID-19

As public conversations around coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) increase, children may worry about themselves, their family, and friends getting ill with COVID-19. Parents, family members, school staff, and other trusted adults can play an important role in helping children make sense of what they hear, in a way that is honest, accurate, developmentally appropriate, and minimizes anxiety or fear. The Center for Disease Control (CDC) has created guidance to help adults have discussions with children about COVID-19 and ways they can avoid getting and spreading the disease.

You know your children best. Let their questions be your guide as to how much information to provide. However, don't avoid giving them the information health experts identify as critical to ensuring your children's health. Be patient; children and youth do not always talk about their concerns readily. Watch for clues that they may want to talk, such as hovering around while you do the dishes or yard work. It is very typical for younger children to ask a few questions, return to playing, then come back to ask more questions.

For many youths, the intense discussions, media images, and messages they are exposed to during COVID-19 can trigger a range of strong emotions. Some may experience anxiety which can present as sadness, fear, or worry, but can also make them irritable and angry. Some anxious youth keep their worries to themselves. It is important to watch sleep and eating patterns as this is often a cue they may be stressed or worried about something. [Common changes](#) to watch for can be found online.

For youth experiencing stress, we can help by spending time with them, encouraging them to talk about their feelings, maintaining a sense of normalcy in their schedules and activities, and providing healthy coping strategies. Below are general principles for talking with children.

- **Remain calm and reassuring.** Remember children will react to both what you say and how you say it. They will pick up cues from the conversations you have with them and with others. Our fear becomes their fear and our calm becomes their calm.
- **Make yourself available to listen and to talk.** Make time to talk. Be sure children know they can come to you when they have questions.
- **Avoid language that might blame others and lead to stigma.** Remember viruses can make anyone sick, regardless of a person's race or ethnicity. Avoid making assumptions about who might have COVID-19.
- **Pay attention to what children see or hear in the media.** Consider reducing the amount of screen time focused on COVID-19. Too much information on one topic can lead to anxiety.
- **Provide information that is honest and accurate.** Give children truthful and appropriate information for the age and developmental level of the child. Talk to children about how some stories on COVID-19 on the Internet and social media may be based on rumors and inaccurate information.
- **Teach children everyday actions to reduce the spread of germs.**

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

Bullying and Harassment

COVID-19 is not at all connected to race, ethnicity, or nationality. School staff should be mindful of 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) which 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.

Coping Strategies

Coping strategies are actions we do to deal with stress. It is important during stressful times to be aware of unhealthy strategies, such as drinking and smoking, or healthy strategies, such as reading and exercise. To support emotional well-being and reduce stress, focus on healthy coping strategies. They may include the following: exercise, listening to music, journaling, reading, playing games, drawing,

talking with a friend, etc. Following is a great resource school counselors often use: [The Coping Skills Toolbox](#) by Baldwin County Public Schools.

Mental Health and Well Being: Addressing Supports and Resources

The impact of a school closure 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 stress of preparing for COVID-19 and school closure can increase the worry and anxiety of students, staff, families, and communities. Districts should work through plans for smooth continuity of services including school-linked mental health and other student supports.

Schools should work with state and local governments and faith- and community-based organizations to facilitate the provision of any needed assistance or resources for students and families.

- Encourage families to continue accessing services.
- Establish a system for facilitating the communication between families and service providers regarding continuation of services.
- Assist families in accessing health and social services by identifying public and private organizations that provide services during a public health emergency.

Services in Your Area

Finding services in your area can be challenging. As we work together as a state to slow the spread of COVID-19, we know social distancing is an important strategy. Social distancing can also be confusing, isolating, and frightening for some. We do not have to go through this alone. [FirstLink](#) can assist in finding food, paying housing bills, accessing free childcare, or other essential services for our students and families during this critical time. They also have a database of community resources which is an excellent resource. [Ndkids.org](#) has developed a statewide map of services to help you find services in your area.

The following resources can help schools and districts provide supports during school closure. Resources can be used by school and district leaders to protect your health and well-being of those you serve.

- [Identifying Signs of Stress in your Children and Teens](#)
- [Maintaining Healthy Levels of Stress in Your Children](#)
- [Teen Suicide: Identifying Warning Signs and Ways to Respond](#)
- [Suicide Prevention](#)
- [Family Voices](#) (aims to achieve family-centered care for all children and youth with special health care needs and/or disabilities)
- [Federation of Families](#) (a parent-run organization focused on the needs of children and youth with emotional, behavioral or mental disorders and their families)
- [Find a regional human service center](#) which offers behavioral health assessments and services.
- Call [2-1-1](#), a simple, free number that connects callers to information about health and human services.
- [National Association of School Psychologists; Talking to Children About COVID-19, A Parent Resource](#)
- [Talking With Children: Tips for Caregivers, Parents, and Teachers During Infectious Disease Outbreaks](#)
- [Coping With Stress During Infectious Disease Outbreaks](#)
- [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Coronavirus Disease 2019 \(COVID-19\)](#)
- [Prevent Child Abuse America](#)
- [Parents Lead](#)

School Reopening After a Pandemic

Returning staff and students are likely to be impacted in some way by the pandemic (e.g., loss of a loved one, hospitalization, economic loss). It is important, to the extent possible, to assess the personal impact of the pandemic on staff, students, and their families prior to reopening in order to obtain the resources needed for recovery. Your school based mental health team; school counselor, social worker, school nurse, school psychologist, and school resource officers can assist developing a strategic plan to address student, staff, and family needs.

School are recommended to:

- Debrief students and staff in order to re-establish normalcy and an environment conducive to learning.
- Address the mental health needs of students and staff resulting from the stress of the pandemic.

It is recommended schools continue with prevention and mitigation strategies for staff, students, and parents. Communication with county public health authorities will remain an important component of ongoing preparedness.

School Counseling

When providing virtual learning opportunities, schools must continue to provide school counseling services, even if this is done electronically. Please see the linked guidance from the American School Counselor Association relating to [virtual school counseling during an emergency shutdown](#). School counselors still must follow all [ASCA Ethical Standards for School Counselors](#). School counselors should also work collaboratively with all stakeholders to ensure equity, access and success of all students whether virtual school counseling is offered synchronously or asynchronously. Click on this link to access [ASCA's position statement on virtual school counseling](#).

Assessment

NDSA:

The current testing window runs from March 16th to May 8th. If needed, we can look at an extension of the closing date. In the scenario of school closing for extended period, the NDDPI would explore waivers of state testing. More information to come as situation becomes less fluid.

NDAA:

The current testing window runs from February 3rd to May 15th in ELA and Math and March 11th to May 15th for science. If needed, we can look at an extension for the closing date. In the scenario of school closing for an extended period, NDPI would explore waivers for state testing. More information to come as situation becomes less fluid.

ACT:

The initial state ACT test was administered on March 3rd. Make-up testing is scheduled to take place on March 24th with the last make up testing date on April 7th. In the event the schools are still closed on March 24th, we would defer to the last testing date on April 7th. ACT is exploring the possibility of an alternate make up test date for states with the current situation. (Paper and pencil test)

There is also the opportunity for schools to switch to online testing and create more flexibility. This creates testing windows during these times: March 24-26th, March 31st-April 2nd, April 7th-9th, April 14th-16th.

* National Testing - ACT has rescheduled its April 4 national test date to June 13 across the U.S. in response to concerns about the spread of the coronavirus (COVID-19). All students registered for the April 4 test date will receive an email from ACT in the next few days informing them of the postponement and instructions for free rescheduling to June 13 or a future national test date.

ACT WorkKeys:

Window opened on March 3rd and closes March 24th. With the assessment being online, the probability for an extension of the closing date increases. Currently collecting this information.

ACCESS:

Window closed on February 21st.

GED:

If continuing to GED test, move to a 50% testing capacity rule to create further distance between testers. Please follow host agency guidelines/closings. (Guidance sent to all testing centers in ND from Pearson Vue/GED)

SAT:

* National Testing - In response to the rapidly evolving situation around the coronavirus (COVID-19), the College Board is canceling the May 2, 2020, SAT administration. Makeup exams for the March 14 administration (scheduled March 28) are also canceled. Registered students will receive refunds.

AP Central College Board Guidance on Advanced Placement:

With school closures due to COVID-19, the most recent updates regarding Advanced Placement (AP) courses and exams can be found on [AP Central/College Board](#).

As stated on March 13, College Board is focused on supporting students' learning of the remaining content and skills in the courses in which they are enrolled. [College Board](#) is also focusing on providing flexible and streamlined testing opportunities and partnering with colleges and universities to ensure students receive the college credit they have been striving to earn all year.

The College Board will make alternative testing dates available for schools mandated to close in March and/or April.

- If a school can make up most of the lost instruction time, the College Board recommends testing on the regularly scheduled exam dates. If a school needs to make up instructional time, they may update students' exam orders to late testing scheduled for the third week of May. Selecting "school closing: election, national holiday, or natural disaster" ensures the late-testing fee is not applied.
- Testing in the fourth week of May is possible, if needed, and must be requested through AP Services for Educators.
- Schools closed for extended periods of time that may need later options (i.e., June retest dates) can contact AP Services for Educators beginning in April to make such arrangements.

Beginning March 16, 2020: If a school lost instructional dates for the following AP courses and would like to request extensions for portfolio submission deadlines, please contact AP Services for Educators:

- AP 2-D Art and Design
- AP 3-D Art and Design
- AP Computer Science Principles
- AP Drawing
- AP Research

- AP Seminar

Some educators may rely on remote instruction for periods of school closure, making it challenging to track student understanding of material and adjust to student needs. The College Board AP has a [one-page overview](#) explaining how teachers can use the free daily online practice in AP Classroom to check student understanding on each topic and skill in the AP course and ensure students are well prepared for exam day.

AP teachers can access any of the following resources to assist with AP Classroom:

- [Foundations](#)
Learn how AP Classroom complements the new AP course and exam descriptions and offers students opportunities for practice and feedback throughout the year.
- [AP Classroom Demo](#)
See a click-through demonstration of AP Classroom, which highlights how to assign, score, and interpret results from Topic Questions, Personal Progress Checks, and teacher-created assignments and quizzes from the AP Question Bank.
- [AP Quick Start Videos](#)
Watch short tutorials on the recent features added to AP Classroom.
Beginning in early April, free online [video](#) lessons will be available regarding AP topics and skills, typically taught in the final weeks of each AP course.

AP Services for Educators contact information: apexams@info.College Board.org or (877)-274-6474

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 policies and guidelines for excused absences. Please exercise caution before starting the truancy process.

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 must plan how they will continue to meet the requirements of English learners' educational needs.

By law, students who are identified to receive English language development services must be provided supports that allow them access to 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 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. For practical strategies and resources to teach K-12 ELs online, [SupportEd](#) is hosting a [webinar](#) Wednesday, March 18 at 2:00 CT. If you are unable to attend the live webinar, [SupportEd](#) will post a recording as well.

Considerations for Supporting English Learners

- **Do we still need to serve English learners?**

Yes. While distance learning is likely a new medium of instruction for many students and educators, the law is clear, students still need to be served. To the extent possible, service should reflect the language proficiency levels of the students. In some cases, different service levels would boil down to the amount of time students receive services from a licensed English language development teacher. We are aware some 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.

- **What types of scaffolds can we provide to English learners?**

Educators should consider the options 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 North Dakota, and it certainly wouldn't substitute for core content instruction, it is the type of resource 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 to consider for students. However, please note, 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 have been made free for educators during this pandemic—to provide small group instruction to students, provided students have access to devices and a reliable internet connection.

- **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 who 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 trusted community organizations and religious institutions should be utilized whenever possible to reach out to families who 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

North Dakota Public schools identified over 2,407 students experiencing homelessness enrolled in February 2019. 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 a robust plan for meeting the needs of these students is also a critical equity issue to ensure all North Dakota 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 NDDPI 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 equipped with internet access.

- Develop, implement, and distribute an assessment of each student's needs related to distance learning that does not presume 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 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 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 Childhood

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.

- 1) **COVID-19 Wages and Benefits:** In addition to the general flexibilities in [ACF-IM-HS-19-01](#), the Office of Head Start (OHS) is providing the following additional flexibility regarding wage and benefits for employees impacted by Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) closures. In response to COVID-19, OHS is advising grantees to coordinate with local health authorities and implement their existing policies and procedures related to closure of Head Start centers during infectious disease outbreaks. Closure of centers in areas heavily impacted by COVID-19 is an important element of containing and limiting its spread. In recognition of the unique circumstances associated with COVID-19, OHS is directing programs to continue to pay wages and provide benefits for staff unable to report to work during center closures necessary to address COVID-19. During center closures, employees should continue to engage families and to deliver services to the extent possible, remotely. This additional emergency response flexibility is important to ensure critical grants management activities can continue during closures. It will help ensure staff are ready and able to return to work as soon as it is possible to resume operations. This flexibility remains in effect through April 30, 2020 unless further extended by OHS.

- 2) **Child & Adult Care Food Program Flexibilities:** Head Start and Early Head Start programs may provide meals and snacks to children during center closures. The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) has waived its group setting meal requirement for closed schools and **authorized special flexibilities** for many states. These waivers include the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP). Grantees may work with their state CACFP agency to determine whether similar flexibilities that can support the ongoing availability of meals and snacks for enrolled children are available during Head Start and Early Head Start program closures. In the event of an extended center closure, perishable food should be safely disposed of in a way that minimizes waste, such as donation to a local food bank or distribution to enrolled families. The Office of Head Start (OHS) reminds programs in affected areas to follow local guidance from health departments and other authorities, including not working when sick, social distancing, and group size limitations. Possible strategies for providing food to children during center closures include the following:
 - Programs could assemble bags of food, including formula for enrolled infants, and deliver them to homes in agency school buses or other agency vehicles. Families could come out to collect the bags or they could be delivered to the door.
 - Food could be assembled, and families could pick it up at a center or other location. Care should be taken to avoid large groups and prevent anyone who is sick from coming to collect food. This could include a "drive-through" station in areas where families have cars.
 - Programs could check with local schools, churches, or other community organizations to see if there are partnership opportunities to increase the efficiency of food distribution.

While we often think of disasters as natural events such as hurricanes and earthquakes, health emergencies can also form the basis of a disaster declaration. The guidance from [ACF-HS-IM-19-01 General Disaster Recovery Flexibilities](#) can be applied to Head Start and Early Head Start programs impacted by Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19).

Communication

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

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

Language Access

Every family deserves access to the information provided by their district or 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 we make decisions, we are coordinating with local and regional Tribal leaders. North Dakota Tribal Governments are sovereign nations and they maintain a unique political status. Each will be making decisions based on what is best for their tribal members. We are aware of how ND school closures may impact Tribal communities and Tribal Nations. This school closure plan provides unique opportunities to the state, school districts, schools and local governmental agencies to meet the needs of all North Dakotans. 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 mental health needs, resource distribution, and educational opportunities in your communities. These considerations offer the opportunity to ensure families and Tribal Nations are meaningfully engaged in solutions and the implementation of services for our students.

For assistance, work with your Home School Liaison, Indian Education staff, and parent committee.

Contact NDDPI Office of Indian/Multicultural Education for a list of Tribal Education Directors.

Guidance on Foundation Aid and Transportation Aid During the Coronavirus Outbreak

Foundation Aid is calculated using membership hours. Membership hours are calculated using the number of hours a student is present plus the number of hours the student is absent. Students can only be a member of one school at a time and students cannot generate a foundation aid payment exceeding 1.00 per pupil payment. Students are deemed to be members of the school during the week of March 16th - 20th per the executive order issued by Governor Burgum March 16th and school districts will be paid accordingly.

The 2019-20 membership hours will be used to calculate the 2020-21 Foundation Aid Payment. To date, 92% of the state aid payment for the 2019-20 school year has been distributed to school districts with the final 8% being distributed by April 1st. Any changes to the 2019-20 instructional hours will not affect the current year payment. If a district's instructional hours plus any time forgiven by the Governor is less than 962.5 hours for elementary or 1050 hours for middle and high school students, the 2020-21 payment will be adjusted accordingly.

Transportation funding will be calculated using miles and rides district's report on their June 30th transportation report pending any additional executive orders.

- Miles and rides are to be reported for transporting rural and in city students between home and school, special education routes transporting students between home and school or school to school, and Career and Technical Education routes transporting students between home and school or school to school.

Broadband Access

List of broadband providers by county (with contact information): <https://broadbandnow.com/North-Dakota>