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Washington Office of Superintendent of
PUBLIC INSTRUCTION
Chris Reykdal, Superintendent

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(X) Informational

BULLETIN NO. 013-20 STUDENT ENGAGEMENT AND SUPPORT

TO: Educational Service District Superintendents
School District Superintendents
School Principals
School District Business Officers
Special Education Directors
Food Service Directors
School Nurses

FROM: Chris Reykdal, Superintendent of Public Instruction

RE: Preparation for Possible Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) Outbreak in Washington State

CONTACT: Martin Mueller, Assistant Superintendent, Student Engagement and Support
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PURPOSE/BACKGROUND

School districts should be engaged in contingency planning to prepare for a potential outbreak of the Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) occurring in Washington state. Many regions around the world are experiencing an expanding outbreak of respiratory illness caused by COVID-19. This virus can spread from person-to-person and the number of cases detected in the United States and many other countries is growing.

Currently, the immediate risk to the general public in Washington and the United States is considered to be low at this time.

However, this is an emerging, rapidly evolving situation which may have significant implications for Washington communities, including schools, in the coming days or weeks. Districts should be developing response plans and establishing mechanisms for ongoing communication with staff, students, families, and communities.

KEY ACTION STEPS FOR SCHOOL DISTRICTS

Ground yourself and your staff in the facts and stay up to date on the current status of COVID-19 in Washington. The best source of information right now is the [Washington State Department of Health \(DOH\) Novel Coronavirus webpage](#). There, you can find a COVID-19 fact sheet available in 11 languages and a page dedicated to schools (which includes the PowerPoint slides from the 1-hour webinar DOH and the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction [OSPI] jointly hosted on February 25). The site also includes workplace recommendations and links to Centers for Disease Control (CDC) resources and information. Both the DOH and CDC websites are updated regularly. Attached is the [Coronavirus Disease 2019 \(COVID-19\) and Schools Information for School Nurses and Administrators](#) document.

Continue to engage in routine infection control procedures. It is important to emphasize—and teach, when necessary—good personal hygiene practices to prevent the spread of viruses. This includes appropriate handwashing, covering coughs, and staying home when sick. Also, standard cleaning and disinfecting procedures are typically adequate to slow the spread of respiratory illness. For more information, see OSPI's [Infectious Disease Control Guide for School Staff](#).

Establish an open line of communication with your [Local Health Jurisdiction \(LHJ\)](#) leadership. In response to COVID-19, Washington state has established a robust incident management structure, led by DOH, which includes ongoing communication with Washington's 35 LHJs. Any decisions to control the spread of COVID-19 in Washington through "social distancing" measures such as cancelling public gatherings; closing businesses, schools, or childcare programs; or others will likely come through this decision-making structure. Now is the time to be working together in your community to prepare for these possibilities. As a reminder, the school district superintendent always has the authority to close schools should the need arise, and state law also provides authority to local health officers to take measures, such as school closures, to control and prevent the spread of dangerous, contagious, or infectious diseases within their jurisdiction.

Routinely communicate with your school community, including your contracted educational providers such as non-public agencies, about this evolving situation. Staff, students, and families should know where to go to find accurate, factual sources of information, and should know that you are monitoring the situation and are in ongoing communication with your local public health officials. A simple step such as posting a brief message to your district homepage with links to the DOH webpage and fact sheets will reduce anxiety in your community.

Intentionally and persistently combat stigma. As new information emerges, please remind your community that the risk of COVID-19 is not at all connected to race, ethnicity, or nationality. Stigma will not help to fight the illness. Sharing accurate information during a time of heightened concern is one of the best things we can do to keep rumors and misinformation from spreading.

When preparing for a potential COVID-19 outbreak, school officials must not rely on assumptions or stereotypes related to race, color, or national origin in identifying students, families, or employees who may have recently traveled to a country with widespread transmission of COVID-19 or who may otherwise be at risk of infection.

In addition, school officials should be mindful that bullying, intimidation, or harassment of students based on actual or perceived race, color, national origin, or disability may result in race- or disability-based harassment that violates state and federal civil rights laws. School districts must take immediate and appropriate action to investigate or otherwise determine what occurred when responding to reports of bullying 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). If an investigation reveals that the actual or perceived race, color, national origin, or disability created a hostile environment—that is, the conduct was sufficiently serious to interfere with or limit a student’s ability to participate in or benefit from the services, activities, or opportunities offered by a school—the school must take prompt and effective steps reasonably calculated to end the bullying or harassment, eliminate any hostile environment, prevent the bullying or harassment from recurring, and, as appropriate, remedy its effects.

Engage in contingency planning for the possibility of extended school closures should the situation in our state dramatically change in the coming weeks. Closures in other countries experiencing the COVID-19 disease outbreak are ranging from a few days to a few weeks.

Below are a series of topics your school district should consider relative to school district closures.

PLANNING CONSIDERATIONS FOR SCHOOL DISTRICTS

Alternative Learning Experiences/Online Learning

While some of you may be in a position to maintain educational continuity for some of your schools or programs using distance learning methods (Alternative Learning Experiences [ALE], online), we urge you to use an equity lens when making these plans. School districts must ensure equal access to education for **all** students. It will likely make more sense to cancel school and/or district services and make up missed days at the end of the school year, rather than deploying a distance learning model that can be accessed by some, but not all, of your students.

Should you decide to continue educational services through a “distance learning” model at a program, school, or district level during a closure and count the time as a school day and claim apportionment, you must follow the requirements and procedures for ALE and/or online learning.

ALE requirements that need to be in place ahead of claiming ALE funding include a school board policy and a teacher-developed written student learning plan for each student. Online learning options also must follow board policy and may need contracts in place with online providers. Both ALE and online rules are “in addition” to existing state and federal policy, and do not waive such policy or requirements. This means that students need to be able to participate in their learning equitably and have access to all their relevant services and supports. Because of these requirements, ALE and online courses may not be something a traditional school could quickly implement to provide the required instructional days and hours. Please see OSPI’s [Alternative Learning](#) and [Online Learning](#) webpages for more information.

Special Education

Provision of education for students 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 with an individualized education program (IEP). Districts will want to plan how they will continue to meet the requirements of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Please consider the following during your contingency planning:

- If a school closure causes educational services for all students to cease within the school/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 of time (OSEP Letter to Pergament, December 2013). This general standard is especially true in cases where the school district will still provide the required minimum of school days.
- Develop a protocol to communicate proactively with parents and guardians regarding their child’s IEP services prior to and during a closure, as well as follow-up communication on next steps once the school reopens.
 - Consider what other agencies and organizations should be included in the communication, including contracted providers and non-public agencies.
 - Review how the closure impacted the delivery of special education and related services to students eligible for special education services.
 - Determine if the delay in services created a need for make-up services (if the delay in services resulted in a loss of educational benefit based on the degree of skill loss).
 - Determine if the delay in services created or changed the student’s need for extended school year (ESY) services based on the length of time of

the school outage and the resulting impact of the interruption to the student's services.

- Any decision to provide make-up services is reviewed by the student's IEP team on a case-by-case basis. If needed, these make-up services should be documented as part of the student's IEP, either with a Prior Written Notice following an IEP meeting and/or through the IEP amendment process.
- Develop a protocol to communicate with school administrators and educators in order to prepare staff for any plans to address the needs of students eligible for special education, child find activities, evaluations/reevaluations, and IEP implementation.
 - IEPs must be implemented immediately upon school starting.
 - Any lapsed evaluations, reevaluations, or IEPs should be scheduled for completion upon the start of school.

Child Nutrition Services

Continuity of food services, particularly for our most vulnerable students and families, is another important consideration. Please consider students who rely on school meals when assessing the need for school closures. Many students rely on school meals to meet their basic nutritional needs.

The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) child nutrition programs, including the National School Lunch Program, operate through group feeding sites. During major outbreaks, USDA *may* allow waivers to certain requirements. We will continue to monitor and await further guidance from USDA.

Apportionment and School District Waivers

As a reminder, a school- or district-wide emergency closure resulting from efforts to control an infectious disease outbreak would meet the definition of an emergency closure due to an unforeseen natural event, which would allow OSPI to **waive school days** under Washington Administrative Code (WAC) 392-129—Emergency School Closure. Additional [information and guidance about emergency school closures](#) is available on the OSPI website.

OSPI will review and amend rules, if necessary, to ensure that school districts' 2019–20 school year apportionment allocations are not reduced due to short- or long-term emergency closure specifically related to COVID-19. After school resumes and the duration and impact of the closure is known, waivers shall be submitted in a letter to OSPI with the elements described in WAC 392-129-125. Should the governor declare a state of emergency related to COVID-19, OSPI will engage in rulemaking to allow for the waiver of annual average instructional hours under the authority granted under Revised Code of Washington (RCW) 28A.150.290(2) specific to this event.

Finally, we want to assure you that OSPI's Continuity of Operations Plan (COOP) includes provisions for ensuring **ongoing apportionment payments** and other school district supports in the event of emergency situations such as a widespread infectious disease outbreak. If your district has a COOP, 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 an outbreak. Your COOP and other contingency planning should include provisions to ensure your payroll processes will continue in the event district operations are placed on hold.

State Assessments

The spring testing window for Smarter Balanced English language arts (ELA) and mathematics begins March 2 and ends June 2. OSPI's Assessment and Student Information division will work with you on any alternate scheduling or related issues should the need arise.

INFORMATION AND ASSISTANCE

For general questions regarding this bulletin, please contact Martin Mueller, Assistant Superintendent of Student Engagement and Support, at 360-725-6175 or email martin.mueller@k12.wa.us. The OSPI TTY number is 360-664-3631.

For specific questions about Alternative Learning Experience, please contact Anissa Sharratt, Manager for Alternative Learning, at 360-725-4954 or email anissa.sharratt@k12.wa.us.

For specific questions about online learning, please contact Nicole Gonzalez, Manager for Online Learning, at 360-725-6058 or email nicole.gonzalez@k12.wa.us.

For specific questions about school meal programs, please contact Leanne Eko, Director of Child Nutrition Services, at 360-725-0410 or email leanne.eko@k12.wa.us

For specific questions about special education, please contact Glenna Gallo, Assistant Superintendent of Special Education, at 360-725-6075 or email glenna.gallo@k12.wa.us.

For specific questions about civil rights compliance, please contact OSPI's office of Equity and Civil Rights at 360-725-6162, 360-664-3631 (TTY), or equity@k12.wa.us. For relevant guidance regarding how schools can protect civil rights during an outbreak, see the U.S. Department of Education Office of Civil Rights [Fact Sheet](#) released during the 2014 Ebola outbreak.

For specific questions about state assessments, please contact the Assessment Operations office at 360-725-6348 or email assessment@k12.wa.us.

For specific questions about obtaining a school day waiver, please contact T.J. Kelly, Chief Financial Officer, at 360-725-6301 or email thomas.kelly@k12.wa.us.

This bulletin is also available on the [Bulletins and Memos](#) page of the OSPI website.

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Deputy Superintendent

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Student Engagement and Support

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Attachment(s): Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) and Schools Information for
 School Nurses and Administrators

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