



COVID-19: Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) Related to School Emergency Preparedness Plans Updated March 13, 2020

The New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE) is providing the below FAQ guidance to assist districts with potential precautions against the spread of 2019 Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19). Additional questions should be directed to NCOV@doh.nj.gov.

Question: Can the NJDOE please provide guidance regarding how attendance will be captured if schools were to close due to COVID-19?

Answer: As relayed in the March 13, 2020 NJDOE Memo, [Guidance Regarding Requirements for Public Health-Related School Closure](#), “[a]ny day on which all students impacted by...a public health-related closure have access to home instruction services provided consistent with the guidance in this memo will count as a day on which the board of education has provided public school facilities toward its compliance with the 180-day requirement in accordance with N.J.S.A. 18A:7F-9.” Because such instruction is being provided, all students can be recorded as present for applicable days unless the district knowingly determines a student was not participating in any such instruction during health-related school closures.

Additionally, the U.S. Department of Education recently released a [fact sheet regarding the Impact of COVID-19 on Assessments and Accountability under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act](#). As additional federal guidance becomes available, the NJDOE will continue to provide schools and districts with any updated information.

Question: Districts are concerned that implementing precautionary school closures might put the district at risk of falling out of compliance with the requirement to provide school facilities for at least 180 days (N.J.S.A. 18A:7F-9). Has the NJDOE offered any flexibility regarding how districts can meet that 180-day requirement in the event of a school closure?

Answer: Yes. Please see the March 13, 2020 NJDOE Memo, [Guidance Regarding Requirements for Public Health-Related School Closure](#).

We encourage districts to consult their county offices of education regarding any questions or concerns surrounding the development and implementation of the school health-related preparedness plans referenced in that guidance.

Question: What students must receive instruction?

Answer: All students served by the district must be addressed in the plan, including students in preschool if the district has state funded preschool and/or if the district services preschoolers with disabilities. The plans developed must include age-appropriate strategies and materials to meet the needs of all students. Districts offering preschool should remember to include contracted providers—private preschool providers and Head Start providers—in their planning

activities. Each district plan must include developmentally appropriate strategies and materials to meet the needs of all students with disabilities educated in schools outside of the district.

Question: How should students with disabilities, including students in special class programs, medically fragile students, students with one-to-one paraprofessionals, and students receiving related services, be accommodated in the plan?

Answer: Home instruction/services shall be consistent with the student's Individualized Education Plan Program (IEP) to the most appropriate extent possible. Districts should talk to parents, who are key members of the IEP team, and help them consider how they may best ensure that students with disabilities have the necessary supports, including medical supports, in place during a public health-related school closure. Consultation with the parents should explore how students with disabilities will gain equitable access to home instruction.

This is a temporary situation, and districts must offer special education services to the most appropriate extent possible while students are away from their schools/programs. IEP teams may need to consider compensatory services when students return to school and IEPs may need to be adjusted accordingly. The IEP team should determine the amount of compensatory related services students with IEPs may require, on a case-by-case basis, when school resumes.

For further information, please refer to the [Questions and Answers on Providing Services to Children with Disabilities During the Coronavirus Disease 2019 Outbreak](#).

Question: How should districts provide meals to students who receive free and reduced lunch during a closure?

Answer: On March 11, 2020, the United States Department of Agriculture granted the New Jersey Department of Agriculture's (NJDA) request to waive the requirements typically associated with the Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) and Seamless Summer Option (SSO) to allow schools to provide meals to eligible students during the period of school closure due to the Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19). Specifically, NJDA is permitted to allow schools enrolled in the SFSP or SSO to provide meals to eligible students in non-congregate settings, as well as create a shortened application process for eligible districts not currently enrolled in SFSP or SSO. *NJDA will provide additional information shortly.*

School districts that plan to participate in these meal provision programs should continue to make appropriate plans and prepare for meal service during school closures. Information regarding such plans and preparations can be found on the [Centers for Disease Control's website](#).

Question: How will districts advise in-district families who have one or more students enrolled in an out-of-district placement (private school or otherwise) if the home district or the receiving school is closed, and the other is not?

Answer: First, each district should update contact information for every out-of-district placement where one or more of their students with disabilities attends. This includes in-state and out-of-state approved private schools for students with disabilities, county educational services commissions jointure commissions, special services school districts, Naples placements, regional day schools, the Marie H. Katzenbach School for the Deaf and other school districts.

Any closures of sending school districts may impact students with disabilities who attend a school away from their neighborhood schools. School districts should maintain regular communication with any of the types of receiving schools listed above attended by their students. In the event of a public health-related school closure of district schools, the district should also get a determination about attendance at out-of-district and out-of-state schools.

Students in out-of-state residential schools may remain in those placements; however, if they will come home during the time of the closure, the local health agency should be contacted for guidance regarding their return to school. Decisions regarding attendance for students educated outside of the district should be made on an individual district basis. If an out-of-district placement remains open while a student's resident district is required to close, and it is determined that the student will not attend school, the home instruction guidance to the resident district applies to that student if he or she does not attend school. The provision of home instruction should be determined in consultation with the receiving school. Ultimately, it is the sending district's responsibility to ensure home instruction is provided.

For further information, please refer to the [Questions and Answers on Providing Services to Children with Disabilities During the Coronavirus Disease 2019 Outbreak](#).

Question: How might a district be able to administer home instruction remotely if families in our community do not have a device or internet connectivity?

Answer: Equitable access to learning is a critical consideration for any plan and will require that a district understands the limitations each student faces. Districts should consider collecting information on which students have access to a device, how that device is or is not shared, and what access each student has to a network. Schools and districts should take care to collect this information in a manner that avoids stigmatization of any students with varying degrees of access to technology and internet service at home.

Instructional strategies should be varied and designed to meet the needs of the students. Districts should consider various solutions, such as utilizing partnerships with local community-based organizations and businesses, developing worksheets for instruction, or uploading of lessons electronically.

Accommodations and multiple means of conducting assignments should be considered for students with disabilities. If students with disabilities do not have access to internet connectivity to participate in remote or online home instruction, the IEP team will need to determine what compensatory instruction a student may require when their school district reopens.

Question: In the face of a pandemic, issues will emerge that are beyond the practical operation of a school district. Does the NJDOE have any advice for the situation in which education becomes less of a priority for people?

Answer: The NJDOE understands districts will need to exhibit flexibility, that the plan may need to be updated as the situation changes, and that the NJDOE will need to provide individualized support to districts on a case-by-case basis.

Question: How will the NJDOE support districts and schools in meeting their requirements to administer statewide assessments?

Answer: The NJDOE is actively engaging with the United States Department of Education (ED), other states in similar situations and school districts to develop guidance for longer-term testing interruptions. NJDOE staff are evaluating all existing flexibilities and working with districts and schools to develop assessment plans that accommodates their circumstances. NJDOE staff are also working with our vendors on contingency plans to accommodate all possible test administration scenarios.

Question: What happens if my school needs to close during the statewide testing window?

Answer: The NJDOE already has a plan in place for short-term closures. If a school is interrupted *during* the testing administration, schools will secure all testing materials as outlined in the testing irregularities and security breaches section of the test coordinator and test administrator manuals.¹ The NJDOE will continue to work with each school and district to provide necessary supports. In the event of a larger disruption in testing, the NJDOE will provide guidance to school districts and evaluate all flexibilities as it relates to the administration of

¹ See the: [2020 NJSLA-ELA, Math, and Science Test Coordinator Manual](#) and the [2020 Dynamic Learning Maps Assessment Coordinator Manual](#)

state assessments. The NJDOE is currently investigating whether to extend the window by a week prior to and after the standard administration window.

Question: What if schools close during the ACCESS and Alternate ACCESS for ELLs? Will that testing period be extended?

Answer: Any concerns about the administration of the ACCESS and Alternate ACCESS for ELLs can and will be addressed, if necessary, on a case-by-case basis, after student health and safety have been assured. At this point, all test administration remains on or according to each district and school emergency plan. However, NJDOE staff are working with WIDA and Data Recognition Corporation (DRC) to determine the impact of extending the testing window for two (2) weeks. The NJDOE will immediately communicate any updates.

For further information please refer to US Department of Education, [Fact Sheet: Impact of COVID-19 on Assessments and Accountability under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act](#).