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## Florida Department of Education (FDOE) Q&A Guidance

The purpose of this Q&A document is to provide additional guidance and clarification regarding the Department's guidance to school districts related to COVID-19 closures. Commissioner Corcoran has made it clear that all decisions are being made with compassion and grace at the forefront.

### K-12 EDUCATION

**1. Q: What does it mean to be closed until April 15?**

**A:** Campuses are closed. The expectation is that school districts operate under the CDC's guidance of limiting groups to 10. Schools are encouraged to operate virtually or through other non-classroom-based means to the greatest extent possible to implement the continuity of instruction plan.

**2. Q: What does it mean that school districts should be prepared to expand their school calendars until June 30, 2020?**

**A:** Our goal is to complete the school year on time and on schedule. The reason we said April 15 is because the CDC is giving updates every 15 days. We are monitoring the state and federal guidance regarding COVID-19 containment, and we will remain in close contact with districts while they are implementing their continuity of instruction plans. As we approach April 15, the date students are set to return, additional guidance on distance learning plans will be provided. Current adopted school district calendars vary; some end in May while others end in June. If you are making updates to your calendar, which is a local decision, know that you can extend your calendars as needed through the fiscal year **if necessary**. Updating calendars and adding additional days is a local decision, and districts may extend their calendars through the end of the fiscal year.

**3. Q: What does it mean to provide flexibility for students who receive IEP services?**

**A:** Each student with an IEP, or 504 plan, should be included in the school district's instructional continuity plan to the same extent as all other students. This plan may include virtual instruction, as well as virtual specialized instruction and related services to the extent practicable. All areas of the student's IEP or 504 must be considered. Any and all required evaluations, IEP meetings etc. may also be held virtually to the extent practical. If there is any type of delay, the nature and extent of the delay and a plan to move as quickly as possible to prevent further delay should be documented. IEP and 504 teams should monitor each student's progress and determine what, if any, remediation may be needed upon return to the student's placement.

- [Questions and Answers on Providing Services to Children with Disabilities During the Coronavirus Disease 2019 Outbreak - March 2020](#)
- [Fact Sheet Protecting Students' Civil Rights During COVID-19 Response](#)

**4. Q: How does the cancellation of state assessments impact students?**

**A:** The answer will vary based on students' placement within their educational journey.

- **Current seniors:** If a senior is expected to graduate in spring 2020 and has not met the exit criteria for Algebra I EOC and/or Grade 10 ELA FSA, or earned a concordant score, this criteria will be waived. However, students still must earn the necessary credits and meet the GPA requirements to graduate.
- **Non-seniors:** The Department is waiving the requirement for non-senior students who are currently enrolled in a course that requires an EOC to take the associated EOC. However, non-seniors who have yet to pass the Grade 10 FSA ELA must still meet the exit criteria by passing that assessment during a future administration or earning a concordant score. Though non-senior students enrolled in the EOC course of Algebra 1 are not required to take the Algebra 1 EOC, they must still meet the mathematics assessment graduation requirement by either passing the Algebra 1 EOC (offered four times each year) during a future administration, earning a concordant score, or passing the Geometry EOC during a future administration.
- **Grade 3 promotion:** Generally, the Grade 3 ELA FSA is a key component districts use to make promotion decisions. Since this data will not be available due to the cancellation of statewide assessments for the 2019-2020 school year, promotion decisions should be made in consultation with parents, teachers, and school leaders based on the students' classroom performance and progress monitoring data.
- **30% for final grade:** For students currently enrolled in courses that include a statewide EOC to be factored into the student's grade, this requirement will be waived. Districts have the discretion to determine whether district-developed EOC assessments are necessary for these courses for the 2019-2020 school year.

**5. Q: Will parents have the ability to request retention of their child in the current grade for the 2020-2021 year?**

**A:** Yes, if parents, teachers and school leaders determine it is in the best interest of the student. Parents play an important role in planning for their students' education. Promotion decisions should be made in consultation with parents, teachers, and school leaders based on the students' classroom performance and progress monitoring data.

**6. Q: Will students receive grades for the spring semester while they are in a distance learning environment?**

**A:** Yes, although campuses are closed, school is still in session and students are still earning grades. Districts will incorporate the process for assigning student grades in their instructional continuity plans.

**7. Q: With the cancellation of assessments for the 2019-2020 school year and school/district grades not being calculated, what will my school/district grade be?**

**A:** Schools and districts will not receive a grade. In the 2020-2021 school year, schools will continue their current turnaround status and tier of support from the 2019-2020 school year.

**8. Q: Will districts have to submit another turnaround plan to the State Board of Education for approval for the 2020-2021 school year?**

**A:** Schools shall continue to implement their state board approved plan in the 2020-21 school year. Any requested changes to a plan must be submitted to the Bureau of School Improvement for

consideration of approval by the State Board of Education.

**9. Q: Despite the absence of a 2019 school grade, will turnaround schools have to adhere to the same requirements outlined in Rule 6A.1.099811, F.A.C., for the 2020-2021 school year?**

**A:** Districts are required to adhere to the same requirements outlined in Rule 6A.1.099811, F.A.C., for the 2020-2021 school year.

**10. Q: Are waivers available for missed instructional hours?**

**A:** Given that the impact of instructional hours missed due to COVID-19 is yet to be determined, the FDOE is refraining from making any decisions related to missed instructional hours until long-term impacts can be realized. As a reminder, districts do not need the state's approval to use available calendar days to remain in compliance with the minimum instructional hours required by law.

**11. Q: How will the cancellation of national assessment administrations (i.e., SAT and ACT) affect eligibility for Bright Futures?**

**A:** Information regarding Bright Futures will be forthcoming.

**12. Q: How do we address students who are scheduled to take AICE, IB, and AP exams?**

**A:** We are working with our partners at AICE, IB, and AP, and information regarding the assessments associated with these programs will be forthcoming.

**13. Q: Will there be a reduction to districts' 2019-2020 allocations?**

**A:** All school readiness, voluntary prekindergarten, K-12, career and technical centers and state college programs will receive their full allocation of 2019-2020 funding.

**14. Q: Will there be flexibility in utilizing categorical funds for districts' 2019-2020 allocations?**

**A:** The Commissioner is affording K-12 school districts the opportunity to redirect unspent 2019-2020 funds from the Reading Instruction Allocation, the Digital Classroom Allocation and the Teacher Classroom Supply Assistance Program to help low-income students purchase digital devices and establish Internet services. Please note also that Reading Scholarship Accounts funding will have flexibility.

**15. Q: Will there be flexibility in utilizing federal program funds to support the implementation of the instructional continuity plans?**

**A:** Yes, districts may direct questions on this topic to Chancellor Eric Hall at (850) 245-7809.

**16. Q: How can we support students' mental wellness in distance learning environments?**

**A:** The Commissioner is affording K-12 school districts the opportunity to redirect unspent 2019-2020 funds from the Safe Schools and Mental Health allocations to virtual and telephonic mental health counseling services for students who need emotional support due to COVID-19.

**17. Q: How should school districts manage school board meeting plans, balancing the need to make critical decisions with the importance of limiting the size of groups to ensure containment of the spread of COVID-19?**

**A:** Boards can meet under the emergency meeting statute as needed, virtually or telephonically, while providing the necessary accommodations to achieve the CDC's recommendations of mass gatherings being limited to groups of 10 or less.

**18. Q: How should districts handle school board meetings?**

**A:** These recommendations are directed at ensuring the safety of all Floridians. All state-level meetings are being conducted virtually, and the best approach is for districts to make every effort to hold meetings virtually. This includes the State Board of Education. In instances where in-person meetings are necessary, Escambia is a great example of a district that has taken innovative steps to conduct official business while adhering to the CDC's recommendations of gatherings being limited to groups of 10 or less.

**19. Q: Can schools still participate in community and extra-curricular activities?**

**A:** Commissioner Corcoran urges adherence to the CDC's guidance for higher-risk populations by cancelling any mass gatherings, community events and extracurricular activities, including sports of more than 10 people in a single occupied space at any educational program, school readiness, voluntary prekindergarten, public and private K-12, career and technical centers, and public and private colleges.

**20. Q: Are there any circumstances under which students may return to a school while campuses are closed in response to COVID-19?**

**A:** Yes, as long as groups are limited to 10 or fewer people, including the educator, in a single occupied space, students may return to campus when continuing operations that, to the greatest extent possible, support remote student learning, including delivery of educational and student services and resources. This includes taking an assessment, such as those related to workforce, adult education, AP, IB, or AICE; or receiving needed instruction or tutoring.

**21. Q: During periods of unplanned campus closures, will districts be able to continue with the National School Lunch program?**

**A:** Yes, during the unplanned break, and FDOE has been working directly with the Division of Food, Nutrition, and Wellness (the Division) at the Florida Department of Agriculture. On March 14, the Division obtained a waiver from the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) to provide flexibility for school meals during periods of school closure. The decision to continue meal services for students is a local one. However, FDOE is hearing consistently that districts are planning on continuing services, and districts must have their plan for alternative meal delivery approved by the Division in concert with USDA. FDOE will be participating in twice daily calls that the Division is hosting with all school districts' food service directors. Note, this does not apply to the regularly scheduled Spring Break, because the waiver only applies to unanticipated events. The Summer BreakSpot program has been activated to connect families with alternative school meals during unplanned campus closures. To access this website, please visit <https://www.summerbreakspot.org/>.

**22. Q: Can teachers return during the one week extended break to work on the Instructional Continuity Plan?**

**A:** That is a local decision; however, if teachers return during the one week extended break, this may impact the ability to make up lost instructional time. Please review your local instructional calendar to determine if professional development (PD) or planning days can be reallocated. Once the district has developed its Instructional Continuity Plan, teachers are expected to play a role in the implementation of the plan.

**23. Q: Should 12 month employees continue working during the one week extended break?**

**A:** This is a local decision.

- 24. Q: Will this affect students in dual enrollment courses that are continuing at their Florida College System (FCS) institution while districts and schools are in periods of unplanned campus closure?**  
**A:** Colleges are working to adjust their schedules and course delivery methods to respond to COVID-19. The district's and FCS institution's dual enrollment coordinators should work together to ensure that students have the opportunity to complete their coursework within the semester timeframe.
- 25. Q: How will period of unplanned campus closures impact graduation ceremonies?**  
**A:** Graduation ceremonies typically begin in May, and we will provide additional guidance later.
- 26. Q: Do you have any guidance on the handling of student data during the COVID-19 response and our efforts to ensure the education of students continues?**  
**A:** The U.S. DOE recently published guidance to help state and local educational agencies to ensure compliance with the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA). See: <http://www.fldoe.org/core/fileparse.php/19861/urlt/FERPACoronavirusFAQ.pdf> and we will make our If you have any further questions, feel free to contact our General Counsel, Matt Mears, at [Matthew.Mears@fldoe.org](mailto:Matthew.Mears@fldoe.org).
- 27. Q: How will teacher evaluations be impacted by the COVID-19 response?**  
**A:** For the 2019-2020 school year, statewide assessments have been cancelled. This cancellation will impact the ability to calculate Florida's Value-Added Model (VAM) as well as provide statewide data that many districts use to calculate the student performance component of some annual teacher evaluations. For teachers who have not had their classroom observation completed, the implementation of instructional continuity plans may make meeting the observation requirement difficult to achieve. As a result, annual evaluations required under section 1012.34, F.S. are waived for the 2019-2020 school year. In addition, because teachers on annual contract who are on the performance salary schedule will not have evaluation results on which to base annual increases, the provisions in 1012.22, F.S. related to this requirement are waived. This gives districts the flexibility to determine how they will calculate a teachers annual salary increases locally. The determination of how districts meet the differentiated pay component will be determined locally.
- 28. Q: What steps are being taken to help teachers who are unable to complete testing requirements for teacher certification?**  
**A:** Given the current hardships that teachers, teacher candidates, and their families are facing related to COVID-19 crisis, Governor DeSantis and Commissioner Corcoran have committed to provide opportunities for anyone to meet all testing requirements for teacher certification, including General Knowledge, Professional Education and Subject Area Examinations, OR to retake examinations not previously passed, all free of charge. Effective through July 31, 2020, anyone wishing to take or retake any of the Florida Teacher Certification Examinations will have the opportunity to take any such tests free of charge. Furthermore, the deadlines to take these tests will be tolled through July 31, 2020.
- 29. Q: What additional measures are available to ensure that school readiness and voluntary prekindergarten providers can be fully funded through this crisis?**  
**A:** With guidance from the Department's Office of Early Learning, early learning coalitions are authorized to mitigate financial impacts by paying for additional child absences while providers are open, reimbursing providers during temporary closures related to the COVID-19 emergency, and extending timelines for provider improvement plans, reports and VPK instructional calendars.

Additional authorities are granted to early learning coalitions and providers to mitigate financial impacts on families.