

April 16, 2020

Superintendents,

We know that your time is valuable, and in an effort to streamline COVID-19 related information, we are consolidating our guidance and informational emails into one per week (unless, of course, an untimely emergency announcement should be necessitated). On April 8, we sent to you **ALSDE Academic and Technical Guidance** manual Appendix A. **Attached is an Appendix B** that goes along with that document. Please review this updated information and also share it with your Central Office section coordinators and anyone else who would need it. We are also providing consolidated SEAL task force work details and additional background information below that is not necessarily related to your Academic Continuity Plans.

Other information:

DETAILS OF SEAL TASK FORCE WORK:

The SEAL Task Force continues to meet weekly to assess ongoing work in LEAs to finish out the school year through alternative methods of instructional delivery. Weekly checkpoints are comprised of the following tasks:

1. Discussion of issues that LEAs have encountered during the implementation of their LEA Academic Continuity Plans (need for PPE, revision of LEA safety plan template, etc.).
2. Identification of LEA issues and areas of concern to prioritize for short term (May – June 2020) and long term (August – September 2020).
3. Development of survey questions for May superintendents' survey to gather information to analyze successes, barriers, and future needs to help the ALSDE prepare for future supports.
4. State support and guidance for reopening with the development a comprehensive planning tool (Academic Recovery Plan) to be completed by June 1, 2020.
5. Subcommittee meetings to provide a report with recommendations by April 30, 2020, to guide the ALSDE in supporting the LEAs with specified priorities:
 - **General Reopening Procedures following impact of COVID-19** – Procedural and preventative actions based on reality of impact to not only schools, but also communities.
 - **Special Education Services** – Considerations for short and long term supports for academic, behavioral and other related services based on adjusted timeline to “reopen” not only schools but also the state entities; considerations for how to identify who and provide summer or other compensatory services based on health crisis, limited teletherapy options, and limited availability of “other related services” staffing; identification of what worked and what didn't work during this remote learning period caused by COVID-19 (as it relates to SPED planning and students) to help with long term planning for future issues such as another pandemic.
 - **State and Federal Impact** – Information related to CARES Act funding, federal accountability, state initiatives such as PowerSchool revised timeline, assessments, etc.
 - **Mental Health Supports** – Identification of what are the most immediate needs and statewide supports that can be quickly and efficiently implemented; long term needs that MUST be addressed from Day 1 of school reopening; planning template to guide LEAs in proactive readiness for staff, students, and community needs based on impact of COVID-19.
 - **Business/Community Partnerships** – Survey to identify where broadband is accessible and where it is used to quickly guide some possible expansion to help close the gap for future access; Continued development of TV, radio, and other instructional delivery mechanisms,

both availability and alignment to standards and resources; identification with other businesses that can continue long-term assistance for pandemic impact preparation related to LEAs.

- **Student Learning:** All Things Instruction – Development of a comprehensive planning tool to help schools reopen with the critical components and a plan to identify and close achievement gaps through development of transition plans, Rtl planning, K-11 screeners and diagnostics to individualize instructional pathways, intense daily targeted interventions, etc.
- **Extending Education Access:** Analysis of current reality of connectivity, online curriculum availability for all grades P-12, and availability of devices now and in the future; realignment of state technology planning tool; and suggestions for what has worked, hasn't worked, and needs to be made available with LMS platforms and online curriculum

The SEAL Task Force is expected to wrap up at the end of April, and the recommendations from the subcommittees highlighted above will impact our next steps to assist you in not only the next few months but will guide our work in the coming year to hopefully help us face future challenges that we all know will be very different in light of COVID-19.

FEDERAL FLEXIBILITIES:

The ALSDE has submitted to the United States Department of Education (USDOE) two COVID-19 waiver opportunities. The first waiver was submitted and formally approved based on ESEA requirements as it relate to assessment and accountability. Details relating to this waiver can be found [here](#). The second waiver submitted by the ALSDE focused on federal flexibility of certain program funds that were summarized in the [Academic & Technical Guidance for Emergency End-of-Year Closures Manual APPENDIX A](#). This waiver has been tentatively approved by the USDOE through email. You can view the actual waiver by clicking [here](#). The ALSDE expects formal approval of this flexibility waiver and will provides updates as they become available. In addition, the ALSDE is currently accepting public comments for both waivers. You can email your waiver comments to federalwaivercovid@alsde.edu. If there are questions please contact Angela Martin, amartin@alsde.edu.

CARES ACT RELIEF FUNDING:

The Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security (CARES) Act includes among its many provisions specific funding sources for Alabama's school districts. This includes a Governor's Emergency Education Relief Fund and an Elementary Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund. The CARES Act also created a higher education relief fund, but that is not applicable for K-12 schools. The core purpose of each grant program is to provide funding to support areas impacted by the disruption and closure of schools from the coronavirus pandemic. We are closely monitoring these funds and will continue to provide updates as they become available.

1. **Governor's Emergency Education Relief (GEER) Fund**—The USDOE will award these grants to States (governor's offices), and Alabama's portion is approximately \$48 million. The GEER funds are flexible "emergency block grant" designed to enable governors to decide how best to meet the needs of students, schools (including charter schools and non-public schools), postsecondary institutions, and other education-related organizations. The USDOE applications for governors to apply just opened, and we expect to know more soon as it relates to Alabama. While these funds are dispersed at the governor's discretion, within guidelines, and the application process is still in development, ALSDE has communicated with Governor Ivey's office justification and a request for substantial K-12 needs. Of course, we understand that higher education and others will be asking for a portion as well. We are staying abreast of these developments daily.

2. **Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund (ESSERF pronounced “EE-serf”)**— The USDOE will award these grants to State Education Agencies (SEA) based on the same proportion as each State received under part A of title I of the ESEA of 1965 in the most recent fiscal year. ALSDE is awaiting the Secretary’s invitation for state applications now. It is expected these funds would then be disbursed as sub grants LEAs in proportion to the amount of funds each LEA received under Part A of Title 1 of the ESEA in the most recent year. We expect formal guidance at the end of next week.
3. **Education Stabilization Discretionary Grants**— Congress set aside 1% of the \$30.75 billion allotted to the Education Stabilization Fund through the CARES Act for grants to States with the highest coronavirus burden. The USDOE will make these grants available to States (governor’s offices) most affected by coronavirus. We expect guidance on these funds in two weeks.

PANDEMIC EBT CARDS:

Another CARES Act program announced by the USDA is allowing states to provide benefits (similar to SNAP) to children who normally receive free or reduced-price school meals. These funds are to be administered through the Department of Human Resources (DHR) and ALSDE has been providing information to DHR to assist them in determining Alabama student eligibility. This program would allow the state to increase SNAP benefits for school age children, and in another provision it would allow children who qualify for FRL, but whose families would not otherwise qualify for SNAP, to receive P-EBT cards. DHR has submitted its application and we are in daily contact with them monitoring the progress. We appreciate their leadership on this important initiative.

Stay safe and stay well!

Eric G. Mackey

State Superintendent of Education