

July 29, 2020

Superintendents:

This week's update will be really lengthy as there is a lot to cover. Please read it and share with your staff as you deem necessary.

Extension of Mask/Facial Covering Order

Today, Governor Ivey extended the mask order through August 31. As it relates specifically to schools, employees and students in 2nd grade and above should wear facial coverings as much as practicable. [See the Order, Section 14, Educational Institutions for exact wording](#). Visitors to school events, such as ballgames, fall under the regular provisions for gathering in indoor or outdoor spaces ([See Section 2](#)) as well as [athletic activities 11b\(i\)](#). This order is applicable to all public indoor and outdoor spaces on P-12 campuses including transportation vehicles such as buses.

The facial-covering requirement does not apply to students in grades P-1, any person with a medical condition or disability that prevents him or her from wearing a facial covering, or persons in a classroom who are able to maintain six-foot distance between seating. To review the Public Health Order in its entirety and review a list of other possible exceptions, please visit the [ADPH website](#).

ADPH Toolkit

We are working with ADPH to finalize guidelines for contact tracing, physical distancing, isolation, and quarantines. Due to the recent changes by the CDC, ADPH is making additional changes even this week. ADPH will release their Back-to-School Toolkit in a [webinar on Tuesday, August 4, 2020](#), from 1-3 p.m. The first 30 minutes will be targeted to superintendents as an overview and the remainder of the session will be targeted to lead nurses, principals, and other school level leaders.

Updated CDC Guidance on Reopening Schools and In-person Instruction

Based on the latest science on transmission risk, on July 23, 2020, the Center for Disease Control (CDC) updated it's guidance on the return to school and issued [The Importance of Reopening America's Schools this Fall](#). As you know, schools play a critical role in supporting the whole child, not just academic growth and achievement. Further, the lack of in-person educational options disproportionately harms low-income and minority children and those living with disabilities. These students are far less likely to have access to private instruction and care and far more likely to rely on key school-supported resources like food programs, special education services, counseling, and after-school programs to meet basic developmental needs.

The guidance outlines [preparations for K-12 school administrators](#) as students return to school this fall for on-campus instruction. It is vital that when school campuses open for in-person instruction, critical considerations are made on how to protect the health and well-being of our students, teachers, and staff to enable schools to open *and remain open*. The [CDC provides considerations](#) for schools to help keep schools operating during COVID-19. Detailed in the considerations are promoting behaviors that reduce spread, maintaining healthy environments, maintaining healthy operations, and preparing for when someone gets sick.

Key considerations include transmission rates in local communities. ADPH has developed a color-coded system guide and [Risk Indicator Dashboard](#) which assists superintendents in determining the risk alert level for their respective community. ADPH's Toolkit will further expound and provide scenario-based recommendations for school systems.

To Decide In-Person, Remote, Blended?

One development that has sent waves through our educational establishment since we released our [Roadmap](#) is the decision by several local school systems to offer only remote instruction during the first weeks of school. Even though we all agree that the gold standard for learning involves in-person instruction with a highly-qualified teacher, especially for younger children, these are not the best of times, nor are we facing the best of choices. As the Governor mentioned this morning, we trust local school system leaders to make the best choice they can with the information available for the beginning of school whether you are beginning in-person, hybrid, or remote. We certainly respect all your decisions and will support all systems with the full resources of our Department as we begin the school year and as we transition to more in-person opportunities based on your situation.

Nevertheless, while our [Roadmap](#) laid out a pathway that sought to balance statewide consistency with local control, it did not presuppose situations in which no in-person option would be offered. As the number of positive cases has grown throughout the summer, many areas, especially metro areas and those rural counties with high incidence rates have opted to begin with remote learning only. Even the new CDC guidance that was released last week emphasizes that the best decisions are locally made. As the Governor mentioned in her remarks earlier today, we want to work with local school systems to develop strategies for a phased approach to return to in-person instruction as soon as practicable and aligns with improving public health trends. As our Department continues to collaborate and identify resources to meet your needs, the following two waivers are examples to our commitment to assist school systems.

School Calendar Waivers

We realize many of you are making adjustments to your school calendars. ALSDE will work to approve calendar waivers with as few as 170 student instructional days (still maintaining 1080 hours via in-person and/or remote learning) for the 2020-2021 school year. Please note that while the ongoing state of emergency does allow for the reduction of instructional hours as well, at this time, we would like to maintain the minimum 1080 hours. Please submit your requests for a school calendar waiver to Dr. Susan McKim at smckim@alsde.edu.

Special Senior Exception/Exemption for Early Release Memorandum Waiver

This unique [Senior waiver option](#) is available for the 2020-2021 school year as a result of COVID-19. The waiver is only applicable to rising seniors who have met minimum graduation requirements. The purpose of the waiver is to support the efforts of schools to decrease student contact time and implement proper social distancing measures. The form can also be found on the ALSDE website under Instructional Services / Waivers / Waiver Documents. If you have any questions, please contact Sean Stevens at sstevens@alsde.edu or Dr. Jimmy Hull at jimmy.hull@alsde.edu.

Statewide School Technology Survey

We are in the final week of our [statewide school technology survey](#) and we need your help. Already, more than 18,000 people have completed the survey, the purpose of which is to build a statewide repository detailing Internet connectivity and Internet-enabled digital device availability as we expand remote learning capabilities and enhance high-quality instruction to students around the state.

Whether a student is attending school in-person, remote/virtually, or blended/hybrid, it is important that we hear from parents across the state, as the survey responses will impact our efforts to respond to ongoing changes relating to remote and blended learning options throughout our state. Please help us by distributing the survey via your local parent communication systems and social media channels. The deadline for completing the survey is Friday, July 31, 2020.

Child Nutrition Program

Our CNP has compiled a list of [questions and answers related to the 2020-2021 school year](#). This document provides guidance for CNP as it relates to the USDA, ALSDE, and ADPH guidelines. This information was provided to CNP Directors on July 15, 2020.

LEA Reopening Plan Rubric

We have completed the [Response and Reopening Rubric](#) for your reopening plan. A staff member will contact you if there are questions related to your plan. If you have any questions or concerns, contact Dr. Elisabeth Davis.

SchoolsPLP & Schoology August Professional Development Calendar

ALSDE is offering additional PD sessions with [SchoolsPLP](#) and [Schoology](#) for the month of [August](#). These trainings will also be sent to curriculum directors and technology coordinators.

- [August trainings by date](#)
- [Schoology training](#)
- [SchoolsPLP training](#)

Education Remote Learning Plan Device Grant Program

Mr. Craig will be sending MOUs for the CRF funding grants for LEAs. As stated in last week's update and WebEx, prior to the expenditure of Coronavirus Relief Funds (CRF), school systems must submit a remote learning plan. Please email your plan to Devlynne Barnes at dbarnes1@alsde.edu. [The Remote Learning Plan template](#) provides LEA's with a template for the information required for the grant.

Superintendents WebEx Q & As

We have compiled the questions submitted on our Superintendent's WebEx on July 22, and provided written [answers](#) as of July 29, 2020.

Digital Textbooks Information

Instructional Services is finalizing a memorandum to provide LEAs with information to access this additional LEA resource.

As always, thank you for all you do.

Eric S. Mackey

State Superintendent of Education

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