

Q-and-A on School Closure – Updated 03.19.2020

Distance Learning

1. **Can school districts and charter schools begin implementing distance learning prior to March 30?**

The eight days between March 18 and March 27 are for planning purposes only. The expectation is that school districts and charter schools plan for an unprecedented potential break in school: possibly 8 weeks of lessons delivered equitably for every student – those with IEPs and 504 Plans, those learning English as a new language, those who are experiencing homelessness, those who need mental health supports, all while determining and communicating with students and families how you are going to take attendance and distribute school meals daily. That is why eight days have been set aside for planning.

Questions school district and charter school teams should be asking themselves during this time:

- How will we support the mental health needs of students?
- What attendance policy will be implemented during distance learning?
- How will IEP needs be met?
- How will meal delivery or distribution happen?
- How will lessons be delivered to accommodate 504 plans?
- How will we accommodate translation and interpretation needs for our English learners?
- How will homeless students' needs be met?
- How will early learning and assessment happen?
- How will we regularly communicate with families during distance learning?
- How will we deliver progress reports?
- How will we factor in tribal considerations?
- How will we factor in broadband or internet access (or lack of it) for all of our students?
- How will we utilize partnerships to meet needs of vulnerable students?
- How are we making sure that staff needs are met?

2. **When do school districts and charter schools need to have their distance learning plan posted to their website?**

The expectation is that school districts and charter schools will post their distance learning plans to their website before March 30, 2020. However, you are encouraged to keep your communities informed as you go about any relevant or timely information.

3. **Are e-learning and distance learning the same thing?**

No. The Minnesota Department of Education is defining distance learning as providing students with access to appropriate educational materials and ensuring they receive daily interaction with their licensed

teacher(s). E-learning is one method for delivery, but is not required as part of distance learning. Distance learning can be provided without the use of technology.

4. What is the impact of this closure on MCA/MTAS?

MDE does not have the authority to cancel/exempt districts from providing the MCA/MTAS. We are closely monitoring federal guidance and conversations to determine whether or not there will be any national decisions that shift testing expectations.

School-Age Care for Children of Emergency Workers

1. How do you define healthcare and emergency workers?

See the [School-Age Care for Children of Emergency Workers: Priority Categories of Workers](#) document on the Minnesota Department of Education website. This document was updated on March 17, 2020.

2. Should school districts and charter schools provide care to school-age children of critical workers that are not included in Tier 1 or Tier 2 of the [emergency worker list](#)?

School districts and charter schools must provide care to all school-age children of emergency workers in Tier 1 under the Governor's Executive Order. Districts and charters should make every effort possible to provide care to children of their own educators, gas and electric utility workers, food distribution personnel, water treatment staff, and others outlined on the Tier 2 list. Beyond this list, we know that there are other critical workers that may request care for their children. Districts and charters are highly encouraged to provide this care for families in professions that are deemed essential to the public if space and capacity allows.

3. When do school districts and charter schools need to begin providing school-age care services for emergency workers?

The expectation is that all school districts and charter schools have a plan in place to begin offering school-age care services to children of healthcare and emergency workers as of Wednesday, March 18, 2020. **We encourage districts and charter schools who are closed on Monday, March 16 and Tuesday, March 17 to have a plan in place if a child comes to school.**

4. What is the cost of school-age care for children of emergency workers?

There is no cost for child care services during normal school hours for children of healthcare and emergency workers. The expectation is that districts and charter schools are providing that care through licensed staff, paraprofessionals and/or other support staff who would normally be working during the school day.

5. Will educators' children be eligible for the school-age care for children of emergency workers services during the school day?

Because school staff are so critical in providing care for emergency workers, schools and districts are strongly encouraged to allow their educators to access the same care for children of families of emergency workers.

6. [UPDATED 03/19/20]: Will schools still continue to practice the Minnesota Department of Health's guidelines on hygiene and social distancing while students are participating in school-age care?

Yes. Hygiene and social distancing practices will be applied including washing hands, avoiding gatherings of 10+ and maintaining 6 feet of distance for smaller groups. For more information, see Minnesota's summary of [CDC guidance for child care](#) and visit the [MDH Coronavirus disease web page for schools and child care](#).

7. What should we consider when setting up our school-age care program for children of emergency workers?

- a. Create a form that captures essential information about the child like name, grade level, medical needs, family contact information, and those authorized to pick up the child
- b. Require some form of ID to confirm the parent of the child belongs to priority category of emergency worker. Approved forms of Identification are:
 - i. Employee Work Badge
 - ii. Letter from Employer
- c. Ensure families are clear on bus transportation times and routes
- d. An example of grouping students in age/grade bands could be: PreK- grade 1, grade 2-3 and grades 4-5 (please remember to practice social distancing practices)
- e. Consider a rotation of teachers and paraprofessionals between classrooms in order to ensure everyone gets planning time
- f. Try to keep children in their home school sites

8. Will bus routes transport children of emergency workers to their school for school-age care services?

The expectation is for school districts and charter schools to create a plan that would allow for transportation of these students to and from school during their normal school hours. If students need before- or after-school care, their family will be responsible for transporting them to and from the school. However, if transportation for these services is normally provided, that transportation should continue.

9. Are school districts and charter schools required to provide meals and school-age care for children of emergency workers during the time period of their already planned spring break?

No. If a school district or charter school's spring break falls in the upcoming two week window, you do not have to provide meals or free childcare services during that time.

10. Which staff should provide the school-age care? If we use Community Education or other child care staff who are normally paid under a fee-based program, will we be reimbursed for that?

The school-age care for children of emergency workers should be provided by paraprofessionals, licensed teachers or other staff, who are already being paid as they normally would. Any additional reimbursements for other fee-based programs will not be made.

Meals and Nutrition

1. When do school districts and charter schools need to begin providing meals to students outside of school?

The expectation is that all school districts and charter schools have a plan in place to begin offering meals as of Wednesday, March 18, 2020. If you are a district or charter that does not have school on Monday and

Tuesday, you are encouraged to do everything you can to ensure your most vulnerable populations have meals available.

Closure Logistics

1. Will school districts and charter schools receive state funding for ADMs during the closure?

Yes. Regularly scheduled cash outflows to districts and charters will not be disrupted due to an infectious disease outbreak closure. Aid payments are not expected to change due to the loss of instructional days. General education revenue will be calculated as if students received instruction on those days.

2. Are school districts and charter schools still expected to pay support staff during the school closure?

Yes. Because districts and charters will be receiving full funding for providing distance learning, it is expected that all staff, including non-salaried, hourly staff, will earn pay and benefits as planned in the school budget and bargaining agreements.

3. Does this mean that support staff are expected to work during this time?

Yes, it does mean that all support staff are expected to work during this planning period. This is an unprecedented time and we are asking our districts and charter schools to be very intentional about how distance learning could affect *all* students and how they deliver a truly equitable model. This kind of moment will take all members of our school community working together to meet it.

4. [UPDATED 03/19/20]: Can staff telework during this closure?

As stated in the Governor's Executive Order, "school employees are directed to report to work in accordance with applicable labor agreements." We understand that you have to safely work with the Minnesota Department of Health guidance in place which includes social distancing and accommodations for medically vulnerable individuals.

During the closure period, districts are expected to fulfill the directives outlined in the Governor's Executive Order as well as guidelines provided by the Minnesota Department of Education. In order to do this, districts need to ensure that sufficient staff are on site and able to meet these demands while also prioritizing the safety of staff. Attention must be given to avoid unnecessary inequities among the school district's staff and allowability for telework.

This information related to staff telework is in accordance with the Governor's Executive Order 20-02 during the March 18 to March 27 school closure period, and it is possible directives may evolve as the COVID-19 situation progresses.

5. Can any program run in a school during the closure period?

No. Aside from working on distance learning plans and care for children of emergency workers, there can be no additional programming in schools during the closure period.

6. What should the school district or charter school communicate to parents who are concerned about student absences on the days before the March 18 Governor closure date?

Districts and charters should exercise care and compassion when working with families who may choose to

keep their children home from school on the days prior to the March 18 Governor closure date. We encourage districts and charters to reassure families of the low health risk in schools at this time, however, recognize that, even with that knowledge, there may be families who would still feel more comfortable keeping their students at home. It is important to reduce the burden of concern of these absent days on students and families as much as possible. Therefore, if a family chooses to have a child stay home during these two days, we encourage districts to consider all options to excuse the absence. This should be done on a case by case basis only in the situation when a family initiates this decision.

7. Are substitutes included as paid employees during school closure?

On-call subs would not be eligible for ongoing pay during the closure or distance learning if they are not working. However, if a district called in a sub to provide or plan for distance learning or they are were already on contract as a long-term sub, they would be paid like they normally would.

8. Are school districts and charter schools expected to continue paying out bus transportation contracts?

Yes, the expectation is that school districts and charter schools maintain collaboration and contracts with bus transportation providers. These professionals are instrumental in supporting the efforts of distance learning specifically for transporting the students of our healthcare and emergency care workers and food to our students throughout the community.

9. Can superintendents subscribe to the website to get notifications when it is updated? Yes. Sign up for update notifications [here](#).

MDE Contact Information for School Districts

- For general questions about COVID-19, please email the Minnesota Department of Health or call their hotline at 651-201-3920.
- For specific questions about online and distance learning, please contact jeff.plaman@state.mn.us
- For specific questions about school meal programs, please contact monica.herrera@state.mn.us
- For specific questions about special education, please contact robyn.widley@state.mn.us
- For specific questions about civil rights compliance, please contact marikay.litzau@state.mn.us
- For relevant guidance regarding how schools can protect civil rights during an outbreak, see the [U.S. DoE Office for Civil Rights Fact Sheet released during the 2014 Ebola outbreak](#).
- For specific questions about state assessments, please contact mde.testing@state.mn.us

Hotline for Families

Below is a hotline that has been created for families to obtain information about childcare resources and other general questions about the school closure. While many of the details around specific plans will come at the district level, please feel free to share the hotline with your families to inquire about state level resources and questions.

The State Information Hotline at the State Emergency Operations Center (SEOC) will be staffed from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. to answer questions about childcare resources and general questions during the time of school closure.

Metro: 651-297-1304

Greater Minnesota: 1-800-657-3504