

Administrative Memo

Date: March 13, 2020
To: School Administrators
From: Dr. Margie Vandeven, Commissioner of Education
Subject: COM-20-001 – COVID-19 Information for Missouri Public Schools

The Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) continues to receive many questions about COVID-19 and how it impacts student attendance, school closure, assessments and virtual education opportunities. We are aware that local education agencies (LEAs) must consider a number of factors when making decisions in this current situation. This memo aims to support school leaders by addressing issues that play a part in their decision-making process, knowing that ultimately, the best interest of students is our guiding factor.

STUDENT ATTENDANCE

Finance

If a school closes or state employees' operations are interrupted as a result of COVID-19, DESE is prepared to continue making school payments.

The formula process is designed to absorb a one-year attendance irregularity for LEAs paid on the first or second preceding year's Average Daily Attendance (ADA). [See § 163.036 for further information.](#) In addition, basic formula payments will not be interrupted if student attendance is lower this school year. Next year's basic formula payments will be based on the highest of a district's first or second preceding year's ADA.

For LEAs that are estimating, their ADA will continue to be paid on their estimate and there will be a correction made next year when actual attendance figures are known. LEAs may need to revise estimates should low attendance occur. These are normal operating procedures.

If the estimating LEA's ADA for this year has been "substantially reduced" from the first preceding year because of "an infectious disease, contagion, epidemic, plague or similar condition," then that first preceding ADA will be used as set forth in [§ 163.021.1\(4\), RSMo](#). This section states:

Whenever there has existed within the district an infectious disease, contagion, epidemic, plague or similar condition whereby the school attendance is substantially reduced for an extended period in any school year, the apportionment of school funds and all other distribution of school moneys shall be made on the basis of the school year next preceding the year in which such condition existed.

Proposition C funds will be treated the same way under [§ 163.021.1\(4\), RSMo](#), and the first preceding year's Weighted Average Daily Attendance (WADA) will be used in the distribution of these funds, should the above circumstances occur. This should curtail any loss in the distribution of Proposition C next year. Proposition C funding will continue based on the WADA of FY 2019 for the current year and there will not be an interruption of payments.

Any student absence related to COVID-19 would be coded/entered like any other student absence related to illness.

Annual Performance Report (APR)

DESE will use Standard 4: Attendance as a reportable item, rather than a scored item on the 2020 APR if it negatively impacts a district's classification.

School Closure

LEAs should seek the guidance and recommendation of local health officials when considering school closures. DESE is working to provide flexibility to allow LEAs to make decisions focused on the health and safety of students, staff and community members, without concern about low attendance negatively impacting district or charter school accountability metrics and payment.

The CDC recently shared new considerations for school closure. [Review that information here.](#)

If an LEA closes, we ask that school officials immediately contact their [DESE Area Supervisor of Instruction](#) to notify the department of your closure plans. The LEA must also submit an official letter to the Commissioner of Education, upon resuming classes, detailing the closure and requesting forgiveness of the missed school hours.

ASSESSMENTS

On March 12, the United States Department of Education released guidance regarding assessments under ESSA. The expectation continues that assessments be administered as required by statute. The guidance indicates that a waiver may be submitted if a district or charter is closed for the entirety of the testing window. Missouri's testing window is currently open through May 22. In accordance with the guidance, DESE's contingency plans include potentially adjusting or extending the testing window, should circumstances call for such action.

VIRTUAL EDUCATION

If virtual instruction options are being deliberated, a number of considerations must be taken into account. Please note that while the Alternative Methods of Instruction (AMI) statute does not go into effect until next year, we encourage LEAs to review the [recently issued AMI memo and guidance](#), from both Quality Schools and Special Education, to help inform a decision about virtual education.

Virtual education can be divided into three areas:

- Delivery of local content by local educators;
- Delivery of vendor content by local educators; or
- Delivery of vendor content by vendors.

Delivery of local content virtually by local educators provides the greatest continuity for students. It also requires that the school have significant resources and training in place well before the closure. Delivery of vendor content by either local educators or vendors allows schools to leverage the instructional management systems and content of commercial providers. Schools may choose to have their teachers deliver content created by others or they may choose to purchase both the content and the delivery from a vendor.

If an LEA can demonstrate that it can meet the needs of all students through virtual instruction, ensuring equal access to opportunities and the satisfaction of the requirements of IEPs, and the LEA wishes to claim ADA, the LEA should submit a letter requesting a waiver to the Commissioner of Education.

Missouri Course Access and Virtual School Program (MOCAP)

LEAs may wish to implement virtual learning through a new or expanded contract with a vendor. DESE has contacted its MOCAP vendors with regard to both if and how the vendors could support schools during an extended closure. Please see the [MOCAP website](#) for complete details.

FOOD AND NUTRITION SERVICES

DESE Food and Nutrition Services staff members have applied for two waivers from the United States Department of Agriculture to allow K-12 schools in Missouri that are closed due to COVID-19 to serve meals to students, either at school or an alternate location. Once approved, the waivers allow meals to be served at no cost to students who currently receive free school meals, making it possible for kids to receive nutritious meals and snacks while schools are temporarily closed. For specific Food and Nutrition Services guidance for your district, call 573-751-3526 or email foodandnutritionservices@dese.mo.gov.

DESE has compiled all of the agency's COVID-19 messages and updates on one webpage: dese.mo.gov/covid19. The [DHSS COVID-19 webpage](#) contains any and all COVID-19-related information for Missourians, and is updated frequently. DHSS has activated a statewide public hotline - 877-435-8411 - for citizens or providers needing guidance regarding COVID-19. It is operated by medical professionals and is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.