



Illinois State Board of Education

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Education-Related Guidance for Illinois Schools and School Districts Regarding Coronavirus/COVID-19

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ISBE is monitoring the rapidly changing coronavirus/COVID-19 health issue in our state, nation, and across the world. ISBE is working closely with the Illinois Department of Public Health (IDPH), Illinois Emergency Management Agency, the Governor's Office, the General Assembly, and stakeholders to address all education issues related to the virus. ISBE is actively updating this guidance as authorities learn more about the virus and its impact on the state.

As with any newly emerging infectious disease, knowledge evolves over time. ISBE strongly encourages districts to check these guidance resources frequently for potential updates.

1. Where can the most up-to-date resources and guidance on COVID-19 be found?

The U.S. Department of Education has resources linked directly to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) at www.ed.gov/coronavirus. Further, current IDPH resources can be accessed at dph.illinois.gov/topics-services/diseases-and-conditions/diseases-a-z-list/coronavirus. ISBE strongly encourages districts to establish open lines of communication with their local health departments.

2. Who would make the decision to close schools?

Local school districts, acting in accordance with guidance from IDPH and local health departments, will make the final decision as to whether conditions require the closure of schools.

3. Are schools being advised to close at this time? (Updated 3/10/2020)

Certain schools, in consultation with their local health departments, have closed. ISBE is compiling information regarding school closures.

For all schools in Illinois, including public and nonpublic schools, a designee should email ISBE at COVID19closure@isbe.net if a decision is made to close a school due to coronavirus/COVID-19. Please include in the email:

- The name of the school(s) that has closed; and for each school:
- Whether or not the school is utilizing e-learning;
- If the school is not utilizing e-learning, whether the school is providing other continuity of education;
- Whether the school is providing students with meals; and
- Whether the school has a set date to re-open, and if so, what date.

ISBE strongly recommends that schools consult with their local health department/IDPH prior to closing any schools due to COVID-19.

4. Some districts have received requests from families wanting to “self-quarantine” their students with no proven medical reason. Should these students receive unexcused absences? Should such a student be labeled truant?

A parent may hold their student out of school for health and safety reasons. Each district is the ultimate arbiter as to whether the reason is truly a health/safety issue. Absences for health/safety issues should not be counted as unexcused and any such student should not be labeled truant.

5. Do days for students absent due to COVID-19 count toward a district’s chronic absenteeism rate?

Given the urgent and rapidly changing landscape due to the spread of the coronavirus, ISBE is working with stakeholders, the Governor’s Office, and the General Assembly to ensure that absences relating to public health emergencies are not counted toward the definition of chronic absence.

6. If a private special education school closes due to COVID-19, what obligations do enrolling districts have regarding special education students being served at the private special education facilities?

Students are placed in private special education facilities by their resident districts, which remain responsible for their placement and travel. Districts should coordinate and oversee any necessary transportation to ensure safety. A resident district that continues to operate schools without closure must serve all students, including students in private special education facilities.

7. Can districts exclude students, staff, or volunteers for 14 days if they present at school after having visited a region affected by the virus? (Updated 3/10/2020)

Per IDPH guidance, any student returning from a location with sustained widespread transmission (CDC Travel Warning of Level 3) should not attend school for 14 days after the return date. Absences for this purpose should be excused. Further, family members of these students should not attend work if they also traveled to one of the locations with a CDC Level 3 Travel Warning. Current information on travel warnings is available at www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/travelers/index.html;

If a student, staff member or volunteer has returned from an affected geographic location within the past 14 days or is a contact to a COVID-19 case, and develops respiratory symptoms including fever, cough, and difficulty breathing, school personnel should immediately report the matter to the local health department/IDPH. Please keep in mind there are other respiratory viruses like influenza currently circulating in Illinois. Schools should inform all individuals to call ahead before taking the student to a doctor’s office or emergency department to prevent any potential spread.

A district should not inquire as to a student’s travel history for enrollment purposes. Once enrolled, a district may screen students regarding recent travel, but must screen all students equally. Any information obtained from a screening will be considered a school student record. Any students identified through a screening must be referred to the local health department/IDPH. All decisions regarding quarantine and exclusion must be made by state or

local public health officials. Districts cannot, without first consulting the local health department/IDPH, exclude or deny enrollment or education to students who are residents of the district due to travel considerations. Districts must not apply standards that may be discriminatory for only one group of students.

Districts may make local determinations on whether it will prohibit volunteers in schools due to concerns about COVID-19. Districts should make local determinations on COVID-19-related working conditions of staff in accordance with any bargaining agreements and in consultation with any relevant bargaining entities.

8. What if schools have to close during the spring testing window? Will the state open a new testing window?

ISBE is aware of the potential disruption to the spring testing window and is in communication with the U.S. Department of Education on this issue. Additional information on this question will be provided in the coming days.

9. What are Emergency Days on a school calendar?

Emergency Days are included on the school calendar by districts for conditions deemed as emergencies that necessitate the closure all district school buildings. Typical uses of Emergency Days include severe weather conditions but would also include circumstances related to COVID-19. Emergency Days must be made up prior to the end of the school year.

10. What are Act of God Days on a school calendar?

An Act of God Day is a day that is used for a condition beyond the control of the district that poses a hazardous threat to the health and safety of the students. Act of God Days may only be requested after the district has exhausted all of its Proposed Emergency Days built into the proposed calendar. Act of God Days must be approved by the regional superintendent and the State Superintendent of Education. Act of God Days count toward the required number of student attendance days in the Public School Calendar and are not required to be made up.

11. Can our district use e-learning days in the event that there is widespread transmission of COVID-19? Can the procedural requirements of e-learning be relaxed to allow for expedited approvals of e-learning plans and a greater number of e-learning days?

(Updated 3/10/2020)

ISBE encourages every school district to immediately begin developing an approved e-learning plan in preparation for a potential school closure. The district's e-learning program must be verified by the Regional Office of Education or Intermediate Service Center for the school district prior to implementation. The e-learning plan must account for providing appropriate learning opportunities to English Learners and students with disabilities and must account for students without access to technology at home. Please see www.isbe.net/Pages/Electronic-Learning.aspx for detailed information and resources. ISBE will host a webinar on developing an approvable e-learning plan 2-4 p.m. on Tuesday, March 17. Please register at register.gotowebinar.com/register/7795133226120905987.

ISBE is proposing legislative changes that would expedite the approval process for e-learning plans and remove the limit on the number of e-learning days a district may utilize during a Public Health Emergency.

12. If e-learning is not possible for my district, what expectations are there to continue the educational environment while schools are closed?

Keeping students engaged in learning, especially in times of uncertainty, is of critical importance. If e-learning is not available for your district, school districts should take affirmative steps to work with their staff and communities to ensure continuity of education to children. All districts are strongly encouraged to continue providing educational supports, activities, and opportunities for students during school closures. Even though Act of God Days will not be counted as school days, districts can still provide for remote learning opportunities, provide take-home packets, and use other methods to keep students thinking about learning. Any student work completed during an Act of God day must not be counted for grades or used in any way to impact a student's academic standing in the school district.

13. Can a district use e-learning for students who have been exposed and need to stay home for 14 days? Can we count e-learners as present for attendance? (Updated 3/10/2020)

E-learning days are meant to be used for schoolwide or districtwide events rather than for individual students. However, such a student might qualify for homebound instruction, completed strictly through telecommunications or the internet. Please see www.isbe.net/Documents/Home-Hospital_QA.pdf for more information.

14. Should students be going on international field trips at this time?

ISBE strongly urges all Illinois schools and school districts to re-evaluate any planned or anticipated travel. Further, ISBE advises all Illinois schools to comply with travel advisories from the U.S. Department of State and the CDC. Guidance from the CDC is being updated on an ongoing basis and currently recommends against traveling to China, Italy, Iran, or South Korea. The CDC also currently recommends postponing travel to Japan if you are elderly or have a chronic medical condition. ISBE advises districts to frequently check for CDC updates on travel advisories. ISBE advises that trips to any countries with active advisories be postponed to a future date or canceled and replaced with another trip. Visit www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/travelers/index.html for more information on travel advisories.

15. Some students have been notified that travel agencies will not reimburse for field trips that have been canceled unless they involve restricted travel zones. What can be done?

ISBE drafted a letter that urges travel agencies to allow students to reschedule or cancel trips and receive a full refund. The letter can be downloaded from www.isbe.net/Documents/Letter-to-School-Districts-Travel.pdf.

16. Some students rely heavily on meals provided by their school for their daily nutritional needs. Will schools be able to provide meals to students during times of school closures, e-learning days, or other times in which students are not physically present at school? (Updated 3/10/2020)

ISBE has applied for a waiver with the United States Department of Agriculture to allow for meals to be served in non-congregate settings (home delivery, meals distributed at designated

pick-up locations, etc.). Federal guidance provides that schools will be required to submit a form to ISBE for approval to proceed with such non-congregate service. ISBE will update this guidance with additional information when the waiver request is reviewed and approved.

17. Can a board of education hold a school board meeting virtually (i.e. via online technology) or by phone in an effort to avoid large congregate gatherings in the community? *(Updated 3/10/2020)*

ISBE is currently working with IDPH and the Illinois Attorney General's office/Public Access Counselor to address issues concerning the openness requirement of the Open Meetings Act, concerns about quorum of members of a public body who must be physically present, and other issues connected to publicly convening board meetings. As it presently stands, per the Open Meetings Act, a quorum of members of a public body must be physically present at the location of an open meeting. ISBE will update this guidance when additional information becomes available.

For additional information and assistance, districts may consider contacting the Public Access Counselor at the Office of the Illinois Attorney General at PublicAccess@atg.state.il.us or 1-877-299-3642.

18. Have there been noted instances of bullying related to COVID-19? What can schools and educators do to ensure that bullying related to COVID-19 does not occur? *(Updated 3/10/2020)*

ISBE has learned of rumors of unlawful bullying and harassment due to race in connection with COVID-19. It is of critical importance to stress to staff, students, parents, and community members that COVID-19 infections are not limited to certain geographical locations, nationalities, races, or cultures. Schools must take a firm stance to discourage and prohibit discriminatory practices and viewpoints in Illinois schools. Any instances of bullying related to COVID-19 must be addressed through the district's required bullying policy. For more information, please see the statement issued by the U.S. Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights on this subject at content.govdelivery.com/accounts/USED/bulletins/27f5130.

19. What if schools closed for an extended period of time and are unable to complete teacher evaluations and remediation plans or are otherwise unable to give timely notice for honorable dismissals? *(Updated 3/10/2020)*

School administrators should continue to take all steps to meet statutory obligations relating to educator evaluations and retention. ISBE is reviewing concerns relating to evaluation timelines and teacher retention, and will consult with the Governor's Office, the General Assembly, and stakeholders in addressing these concerns.

20. Is there guidance regarding continuing with school sporting events, graduation ceremonies, and other large public gatherings? *(Updated 3/10/2020)*

ISBE strongly recommends that districts review all nonessential school-related travel, as well as gatherings and events where large numbers of people will be present. Districts should make local determinations on proceeding with travel, gatherings, and events in consultation with IDPH/local health department.

The Illinois High School Association (IHSA) governs participation in athletics for more than 800 member high schools in Illinois and administers state tournaments in all sanctioned activities and sports. ISBE understands that the IHSA is monitoring the recommendations of its Sports Medicine Advisory Committee, IDPH, and the CDC regarding protections against the spread of the Coronavirus. ISBE understands that all IHSA-sanctioned events are currently continuing as planned. IHSA recommends the individual personal precautions advocated by IDPH and the CDC, such as frequent handwashing and staying home when sick.

ISBE understands that a school closing does not automatically preclude students from practicing for or competing in IHSA-sanctioned sports and activities. Direction for students from specific schools or districts to not participate would come from the local school district, in consultation with IDPH/local health department.

21. What information may school personnel share regarding student transmission of COVID-19? (Updated 3/10/2020)

Schools should work with the local health department and other relevant leadership to communicate possible COVID-19 exposure in conformity with legal the requirements of student data privacy laws and regulations (*e.g.*, Family Education Rights and Privacy Act (34 C.F.R. 99.30)(FERPA), Illinois School Student Records Act (105 ILCS 10)(ISSRA), and Student Online Personal Protection Act (105 ILCS 85/1 et seq.)(SOPPA). FERPA and ISSRA permit schools to disclose school student records of affected students in COVID-19 matters, without consent, with appropriate parties in connection with an emergency, if knowledge of this information is necessary to protect the health or safety of the student or other individuals. 34 C.F.R. 99.31-99.32 and 99.36. Upon such disclosure, the school must record in the student's education records the articulable and significant threat that formed the basis for the disclosure and the parties to whom information was disclosed. 34 CFR § 99.32(a)(5).

22. Are IEP meetings going to be delayed or cancelled? (Updated 3/10/2020)

Scheduling of IEP meetings is a local determination. ISBE continues to expect that all districts will comply with requirements to timely convene IEP meetings for students. Schools may wish to avail themselves of the opportunity to ensure parent participation at meetings via alternate means, including telephone or videoconference, which are allowable under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. 34 C.F.R. 300.322.

23. Are special education due process hearings and mediations going to be delayed or cancelled? (Updated 3/10/2020)

No. ISBE is not presently taking any steps to delay or cancel any special education due process hearings or mediations. Districts should continue to meet any obligations relating to due process timelines.