

March 15, 2020

Dear Colleagues:

Thank you for your extraordinary leadership over the last week and your ongoing efforts to lead your communities during the continuously evolving COVID-19 pandemic. While there is no blueprint for how to respond to a health crisis of this magnitude, the ALSDE team is joining many leaders of state and district education systems across the country to meet students' basic needs, minimize disruptions, and provide academic instruction while responding to breaking developments in real time.

As you continue to facilitate the efforts to safeguard your schools from the spread of the virus, I appreciate your patience and flexibility as we try to provide you with the most current information and resources you may need during this time. The ALSDE is reviewing all possible impacts of the school closure, and we understand that you have many technical questions. Through ongoing communication efforts, we will continue to clarify questions you have, update you as new information is shared, and provide you with resources to assist you.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) has approved ALSDE's waiver to grant approval for Alabama to provide meals during an unanticipated school closure due to the COVID-19 at both school and non-school sites and in a non-congregate setting. Please make every effort to provide meals for all children who need them, no matter their resources and no matter what school they attend, in the way that works best for your community, such as grab-and-go or delivery while also maintaining social distancing.

This is an unprecedented event in our lifetime. This public health emergency is evolving rapidly, and we will continue to inform you as quickly as information becomes available. To assist you with this everchanging landscape, you may access updates at the Alabama Department of Public Health at www.alabamapublichealth.gov/infectiousdiseases/index.html or 1-800-338-8374. Additionally, the ALSDE is developing email addresses for both the general public and school officials to submit *Emergency School Closure* questions. We know information is changing daily, so the ALSDE is committed to continuously monitoring these questions submitted and will be answered and updated on a consistent basis. We will communicate these email addresses by the end of the day Monday, March 16, 2020, and we ask that you share these through your social media outlets. Updates will be provided as necessary. We will get through this as we continue to work together for "Every Child. Every Chance. Every Day."

Sincerely,

Eric G. Mackey

State Superintendent of Education

COMPREHENSIVE EMERGENCY SCHOOL CLOSURE GUIDANCE

ACTIVITIES All school-sponsored activities scheduled during the statewide school closure are suspended until April 30, 2020. The AHSAA's most recent issued guidance allows AHSAA-sanctioned activities to continue through Tuesday, March 17, 2020.

ASSESSMENTS, ACCOUNTABILITY, AND CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM The U.S. Department of Education has communicated that it will make waivers available for assessments and accountability. Obviously, no state testing will take place during the closure period. The ALSDE will work in partnership with stakeholders to determine next steps for Alabama to accommodate the school closure period. Also, many, but not all, juniors have completed the state-sponsored ACT. The ALSDE is committed to working with vendors to identify additional testing opportunities. Additional information regarding assessment timelines will be provided as they become available.

CAREER & TECHNICAL EDUCATION During the state-mandated school closure, CTE centers and programs will remain closed.

- ✓ **Continuing Apprenticeships, Internships, etc.:** As a general rule when school is closed, ALL related activities are also closed.

CONTINUITY OF EDUCATION LEAs have full autonomy to provide optional continuous learning opportunities during the state-mandated school closure. If you are planning to provide optional learning opportunities, your procedures should align with those utilized to during summer breaks or other "school calendar breaks". Consider this situation similar to assisting with the prevention of the "Summer Slide". Use the same parameters when distributing resources, providing multiple communication efforts, and ensuring the focus is on additional enrichment that can help to decrease a "gap" or "slide" in learning during this time when school is CLOSED. The following descriptions may be beneficial when communicating your instructional plan:

- ✓ **E-Learning (eDay):** These learning opportunities are days that **require** students to work at home, to complete their work electronically, and don't require their physical attendance in school buildings. An eDay is recognized by the ALSDE as a "regular day of instruction".
During the mandated statewide school closure, eDays are not permissible because schools are closed.
- ✓ **Digital & Hard Copy Learning (Blended):** Schools may use a digital platform such as Google Classroom or a Learning Management System (Canvas, Schoology, etc.) to provide access to learning opportunities for students during the statewide school closure. If you utilize a digital learning option, you should provide hard copies for students and parents/guardians as needed. Providing both of these options to access materials lends itself to equitable access for all students and parents who may or may not have technology or internet services at home. Ensure that additional copies are provided in the school's front office (if applicable), and please stress the importance of working collaboratively with parents during this time. If your district is providing meal service, provide hard copies of instructional materials in this location for easy access. If you plan to provide learning opportunities, remember that there are students and geographic areas that may not have access to technology-based options.

- ✓ **Virtual Learning:** Formal online education program for students to learn through a total online learning environment/platform.
- ✓ **Alternative Learning Options/Accommodations:** Alternative assignments or accommodations should be made for students who do not have technology and internet access. (i.e. extended deadlines, extra time for completion of assignments).
- ✓ **AMSTI & ARI State and Regional Staff Support:** We are committed to providing Alabama educators with ongoing support. Staff will be available from 9:00 -12 noon each day to provide virtual coaching, professional learning, and resources for teachers. Other hours may also be available upon request.

Special Note Concerning Online/Virtual/eDay Learning Opportunities: E-learning can be utilized as simply a part of a traditional classroom education model or as part of a full online/virtual learning program. LEAs should note that anytime schools are “open”, access to services must be equally provided, including to students who do not have access to technology and students receiving special education services. This means that schools are only “open” if educational services are being delivered to all students in any form, i.e. traditional classroom models, eDays, or full virtual learning programs. As the period of closure through April 6, 2020, is reassessed, ALSDE expects to immediately assemble a small taskforce to consider varying levels of capacity across the state to reopen schools without physically requiring students to report to the districts.

LESSON GUIDANCE There are a multitude of “free” resources that have been shared on social media. However, they may or may not be beneficial or accessible to the learning needs of your students. Use this real-world event to provide innovative learning opportunities for students to learn through venues opportunities that they be aligned to Alabama standards, are accessible through a variety of methods, and allow students to demonstrate mastery through multiple options (writing, project-based, etc.).

K-12 Standards-Based & Grade-Aligned Instructional Resources: The ALSDE Office of Student Learning (OSL) has developed an optional “Distance Learning Resource” platform to assist LEAs with planning efforts to provide instructional opportunities for grades K-12 by grade-band and by subject. You can access resources here: <https://drive.google.com/open?id=1DUbLvnp6CXifqe-G-OijnchYQv-4uB3K>

- General information
 - Parent communication resources
 - Standards-based instructional materials
 - Alabama-aligned instructional resources
- ✓ **Additional Ideas:**
 - Send library books home with students and/or print out articles, poetry, and writing prompts;
 - Assign a long-term research-based project aligned to multiple standards;
 - Put together learning packets to review or enhance material already taught;
 - Print and upload supplemental lessons that one often does not have time to do in class or additional practice in subject and skill areas that have not been mastered (Example: fractions, multiplication tables, read aloud);

- Have students write reflection essays about a movie watched or a book read and scaffold the assignment for different age ranges;
- Assign journal writing with a rubric and expectations to capitalize on this real-world learning experience (use this time to have students write about their experiences, their feelings, and draw conclusions or inferences based on their experiences during this time).

GRADUATION Ensuring that the Class of 2020 is on track to graduate is an important priority. Schools should take this opportunity to review the status of each senior to determine the extent to which the student has met graduation requirements for the Class of 2020. It is important that schools understand the needs of each of their students and have, to the extent possible, a plan to help each student complete these requirements during the remainder of the school year, both during the closure period (as practicable) and at such time as school may resume. Should the current situation change, the Department of Education will provide additional information. Our commitment is to provide reasonable flexibility in the interest of doing what is right for students.

FACILITIES During this time, district leaders should limit physical access to essential personnel, including school staff and others such as outside contractors, maintenance, etc.

FEDERAL FUNDING Federal Funding will continue as usual and will not be impacted by the school closure.

MULTILINGUAL EDUCATION RESOURCES <https://switchboardta.org/blog/a-round-up-of-multilingual-resources-on-covid-19/>

SPECIAL EDUCATION SERVICES When instructional opportunities are offered to all students, including alternate delivery models like online learning or distance learning, then districts are required to provide students with disabilities special education services. If, however, a student with a disability cannot access the alternate delivery models being offered to general education students, then the district should consult with parents and/or caregivers to determine the needs of the student and identify the most appropriate means for meeting those needs during the closure period.

- ✓ **USDOE Guidance: Questions and Answers for Providing Services To Children with Disabilities During a COVID-19 Outbreak:**
<https://www2.ed.gov/policy/speced/guid/idea/memosdcltrs/qa-covid-19-03-12-2020.pdf>
- ✓ **IEP Meetings, Hearings, Due Process/Mediations:** Further guidance will be issued by end of the day on Monday, March 16, 2020.

MEDICATION Districts must ensure families have access to needed medication stored in the school or nurses' office, which may include parent pickup of needed medication during statewide school closure.

NUTRITION ALSDE USDA's waiver to provide meals during school closures has been approved. Districts that choose to participate during this time will need to follow the Summer Food Service Program, Seamless Summer Option (SSO), or complete an application to be a Summer Food Service Program provider. The ALSDE will be processing applications and provide additional guidance following USDA correspondence on Monday, March 16, 2020.

POWERSCHOOLMIGRATION We are collaborating with PowerSchool staff to determine what options the ALSDE has regarding the June 5, 2020, migration date, which requires all your LEA data to be correct and entered prior to the July 13, 2020, rollover date. We will provide updates as soon as they are available.

STAFFING LEAs have authority to make staffing decisions during this time. Each LEA has unique needs, and we ask that you work closely with your administrators and legal team to meet the needs of your community. Based on the Governor's guidance for state government employees on March 15, you should consider implementing telework, flexible work schedules, and other techniques for accomplishing necessary duties to maintain LEA essential operations such as technology, CNP, finance, human resources/personnel and communication staff. Additionally, you should provide consistent guidance and expectations (checking emails, working on paperwork, coming to the building, etc.) for all employees during the school closure. Remember to stress social distancing in all situations.