

MDE Communications

Thursday, March 12, 2020 1:23 PM

Coronavirus (COVID-19) Guidance on to School Districts as of March 12, 2020

Greetings Superintendents, Curriculum Coordinators, Federal Program Directors, Special Education Directors, CTE Directors, District Test Coordinators, Principals, Counselors, School Nurses and Teachers:

The Mississippi Department of Education (MDE) **will provide daily updates to school districts about the coronavirus (COVID-19). All MDE updates are posted at www.mdek12.org/covid19. The MDE will participate in a conference call with the U.S. Department of Education and other federal officials later today. Any additional information from this call will be sent to you in a follow-up email.**

March 12, 2020, 1:23 p.m.

As of March 12, there is one confirmed case of the coronavirus (COVID-19) in Mississippi. The individual is a Forrest County adult male who recently traveled to Florida. Though the infection is currently limited to Forrest County, school districts statewide should be actively engaging in contingency planning now, should the need for closures arise. **The Mississippi Department of Health (MSDH) is not recommending that schools close at this time.**

Based on the latest guidance from MSDH, districts should adhere to the following:

- Stay informed with current, accurate information from MSDH: msdh.ms.gov.
- Avoid any mass gatherings with 250 or more people, including school assemblies and athletic events.
- Share good hygiene practices with students and staff.
- Routinely clean and disinfect commonly touched surfaces.
- Keep in contact with local health department and MSDH and ensure local officials have current contact information for the district superintendent.
- Communicate regularly with students, families and your community.
- Intentionally combat bias and stigma and address bullying based on students' background or ethnicity.
- **Develop contingency plan for the possibility of extended school closures.**

School Closure Processes

- The MSDH requires schools to consult with their county health department and the MSDH to determine when it is appropriate to close a school. Schools and districts are to follow the [Mississippi Pandemic Influenza Incident Index](#) for steps for school closure (see section labeled Attachment A, Section II J.a.).
- Any school closures should be reported immediately to MDE by emailing mdeschoolclosures@mdek12.org.

Make-up days

- State law requires schools to make up any days schools may close, unless the Governor of Mississippi or the U.S. President declares a state of emergency.

References:

Miss. Code Ann. § 37-13-65. Closing of schools for holidays and emergencies.

Upon application from the school board, the superintendent of schools may close any school because of an epidemic prevailing in the school district or because of the death, resignation, sickness or dismissal of a teacher or teachers or because of any other emergency necessitating the closing of the school. However, all such schools so closed shall operate for the required full time after being reopened during the scholastic year, unless the school board of the local school district submits a plan to alter the school term that is approved by the State Board of Education under the authority of Section 37-13-63(2).

Miss. Code Ann. § 37-13-63. Minimum length of school term.

(1) Except as otherwise provided, all public schools in the state shall be kept in session for at least one hundred eighty (180) days in each scholastic year.

(2) If the school board of any school district shall determine that it is not economically feasible or practicable to operate any school within the district for the full one hundred eighty (180) days required for a scholastic year as contemplated due to an enemy attack, a man-made, technological or natural disaster or extreme

weather emergency in which the Governor has declared a disaster or state of emergency under the laws of this state or the President of the United States has declared an emergency or major disaster to exist in this state, the school board may notify the State Department of Education of the disaster or weather emergency and submit a plan for altering the school term. If the State Board of Education finds the disaster or extreme weather emergency to be the cause of the school not operating for the contemplated school term and that such school was in a school district covered by the Governor's or President's disaster or state of emergency declaration, it may permit that school board to operate the schools in its district for less than one hundred eighty (180) days; however, in no instance of a declared disaster or state of emergency under the provisions of this subsection shall a school board receive payment from the State Department of Education for per pupil expenditure for pupils in average daily attendance in excess of ten (10) days.

State Testing

- The testing window for ELPT is currently open, and MAAP-A opens March 16. There are no further updates about state testing at this time. We are hoping for additional guidance following today's conference call with the U.S. Department of Education.

School Lunches

- MDE has received approval from USDA for schools eligible for the Summer Food Service Program (over 50% Free/Reduced) to serve meals during time of unanticipated school closures. MDE is awaiting approval for a waiver to allow for non-congregate feeding, so that schools may use grab-and-go options to allow for social distancing.
- The MDE will promptly share any additional guidance received from USDA.

School Organization Conferences and Competitions

- Future Business Leaders of America (FBLA), Health Occupations Student of America (HOSA), SkillsUSA, and Technology Student Association (TSA) statewide events scheduled for this spring are being cancelled in accordance with MSDH guidance.

Distance/Online Learning

- Many districts have requested guidance about the feasibility and legality of providing online learning in the event of an extended school closure. We are examining this process and potential challenges districts may face with online delivery. Further information regarding this will follow.

IHL & Community Colleges

- Mississippi's eight public universities have modified the schedules for the spring semester classes to inhibit the spread of the coronavirus.
- University classes will resume on Monday, March 23, and will be taught online and via other alternative instructional methods.
- Community colleges will meet this afternoon to determine any modification to their schedules.
- Additional guidance will be forthcoming regarding dual credit courses.