

ARCHIVE: COVID-19 Superintendent Call

March 27, 2020

The following are questions asked by directors of schools during this call and the point-in-time answers provided by the department. Additionally, Commissioner Schwinn made several announcements during the call, which are detailed by category. For additional guidance and up-to-the-minute supports, please check the TDOE website for more information: <https://www.tn.gov/education/health-and-safety/update-on-coronavirus.html>.

Academics

- Announcement: The Department has partnered with PBS to provide instructional content.
 - **FURTHER INFORMATION:** Six channels will air instructional content developed in collaboration with the Department and teachers around the state. Several districts have been working with their local TV channels to air and broadcast instructional content to students, which is fantastic. The Department has also received inquiries from NPR and other radio stations across the state. The TV stations have agreed to air the same content across the state from 10am to noon. There will also be up to four hours of content airing at various times overnight, to be watched live or recorded for later viewing. The Department has been working with teachers to develop and schedule this content. The Department will be sure to let districts know as more partnerships become available.
- Question: How will the instructional content aired on PBS utilize high-quality instructional materials, and what will be included in each episode?
 - **RESPONSE:** Additional details about this partnership will be released in the next week or so.
- Question: What options are available for communities that are in non-Tennessee PBS markets (such as Alabama)?
 - **RESPONSE:** For communities near the state line with Alabama who may not receive Tennessee TV channels, the information that PBS will be broadcasting will also be available through PBS online and the department will be making this content available online as well. Hopefully those who may not receive streaming from the local TV channels will have options to access that content.
- Question: How might districts access PBS shows if they are airing at times where other things may be scheduled, such as mealtimes?
 - **RESPONSE:** The instructional content airing on PBS can be recorded for later viewing or accessed through PBS online.

Nutrition

- Announcement: Updates related to school nutrition and relevant waivers.
 - **FURTHER INFORMATION:** As the COVID-19 response efforts continue to unfold, the Department will provide additional updates related to nutrition programs, including updated available flexibilities. The information below reflects key program requirements with new options to ensure students may continue to receive these essential services.
- 1. Meal Pattern Waiver: The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) has released a nationwide waiver to states to permit school food authorities (SFAs) to vary from meal pattern requirements. In order to utilize the waiver, SFAs must send notice to the state agency for approval. Requests should include a brief justification of the challenge creating the need and details of which meal pattern component is impacted. These requests should follow the template available on TDOE's COVID-19 page (Meal Pattern Flexibility Form) and be sent directly to Sandy.Dawes@tn.gov, School Nutrition State Director.
 - a. While nutrition programs are encouraged to maintain and meet nutrition standards for each program to the greatest extent possible, approved waivers will allow districts to serve meals without all meal pattern requirements in place. The nationwide waiver is currently in effect until April 30, 2020, and will be reassessed on a rolling basis. (Waiver memo is available on TDOE's COVID-19 web page.)
- 2. Child Present for Meal Service Waiver: Under a recently released nationwide waiver, TDOE is now waiving the requirement for children to be present at the time of meal service. Parent and guardians may now pick-up school meals from service sites on behalf of their children. SFAs must have plans in place to ensure accountability and program integrity, specifically ensuring meals go to children under 18 and duplicate meals are not distributed to any child. This waiver is effective immediately and remains in effect until June 30, 2020, or until expiration of the federally declared public health emergency, whichever is earlier. (Waiver memo is available on TDOE's COVID-19 web page.)
- 3. Support Opportunities: USDA, TDOE, and various partner organizations are continuously exploring new support strategies to ensure meal service and nutrition supports continue for students.

As these opportunities become available, the department will share the program information with both Directors of Schools and local nutrition directors to support any applications and program implementation. These will also be updated in the School Nutrition Toolkit.

- a. Meals to You: USDA has partnered with the Baylor University Collaborative on Hunger and Poverty to expand its Meals to You program to target rural schools that need assistance in providing meals to FRPL students. The program partners districts with vendors to provide 5 days' worth of shelf-stable, nutritious meals that are packaged and delivered directly to student homes. The program will prioritize students who do not currently have access to a nutrition program site and have an active outbreak of COVID-19. Schools must also have closures scheduled for at least four weeks at the time of the application to be eligible. USDA hopes to continue to expand the capacity of the program in the coming weeks and months. More specific application information is available on the program website, available [here](#), or please contact Rachel Draper (Rachel.E.Draper@tn.gov) for additional questions.
- b. No Kid Hungry: No Kid Hungry is providing the opportunity for school districts and nonprofit organizations to apply for some additional funding during these uncertain times. \$5 million in emergency grant funds is being offered nationwide to support local school districts and nonprofit organizations to ensure kids get nutritious foods during school closures. For more information please visit the No Kid Hungry website.

Special Populations

- Announcement: The call focusing on Special Education will be moving to Monday, March 30 at 1pm CT and will be extended to 45 minutes.
 - **FURTHER INFORMATION:** The Department is seeking additional clarity and guidance from the US Department of Education. The Department's special populations team will notify district special education directors of this change. This will allow the Department to respond to feedback from districts and, ideally, have clarified special education guidance from the US Department of Education that the Department have not yet received. The Department will still address some bigger picture questions, but given that

this is federal law, the Department requires some response from USDOE on specific questions from districts.

- Question: How should districts proceed with current IDEA discretionary grants and the status of applying for next year's grants?
 - **RESPONSE:** Districts with questions related to their current IDEA discretionary grants should reach out to Allison Davey at Allison.Davey@tn.gov. Grant applications for next year's discretionary grants will remain open in ePlan until May 15th. This deadline may be revisited depending on the length of school closures.

Staffing

- Question: Please discuss any updates about PDPs for teachers.
 - **RESPONSE:** The Department recommends that districts exercise additional flexibility for educators with licenses expiring August 31, 2020, who are impacted by closures or cancellations of professional development activities. Online learning and development activities that meet the state board requirements for the award of PDPs should be accepted. Information about qualifying activities is available [here](#).

Along with the other licensure and evaluation questions, this should be addressed at the upcoming State Board meeting on April 9 through emergency rule or policy guidance.

Communications

- Announcement: In response to district feedback, starting next week, commissioner calls with superintendents have been moved to Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays at 1 pm CT.
- Announcement: The Department has added additional information to the COVID-19 page on the website.
 - **FURTHER INFORMATION:** For convenience, the top of the coronavirus webpage now includes a panel at the very top with a daily update, which is updated in real time to list resources that are either newly added or updated that day.

Federal Programs

- Announcement: The Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (CARES Act), was signed into law today by President Trump. The Department will review this legislation thoroughly and provide guidance on the law's impacts on districts and schools.

Legal requirements or needs

- Reminder: School districts do not need to submit waivers for instructional days.
 - **FURTHER INFORMATION:** Pursuant to HB 2818/SB2672, the commissioner granted a blanket waiver for all instructional days missed due to COVID-19 and the tornado and severe weather that impacted middle Tennessee on March 3. These days should be coded as Commissioner Waived/Instructional (WN).
- Question: Do districts still need to submit a request to use stockpile days if they still have them to use?
 - **RESPONSE:** No, a request to use stockpile days does not have to be submitted for days missed due to COVID-19. School districts may simply code days missed as stockpile days in EIS until their stockpile days are exhausted. Once all stockpile days have been used, days missed due to COVID-19 may be coded as commissioner waived (WN).
- Announcement: There will be a State Board of Education (SBE) emergency rules meeting on April 9.
 - **FURTHER INFORMATION:** As a reminder, the SBE has multiple roles and responsibilities, including:
 - Adopting rules and policies to help implement laws passed by the General Assembly
 - Being responsible for:
 - Setting school and district accountability;
 - Approval of teacher evaluation procedures;
 - Adopting academic standards;
 - Regulating teacher preparation programs;
 - Issuing educator licenses (though the Department executes the administration of this work);
 - Licensure discipline;
 - Adopting a state approved textbook and instructional materials list;
 - Appellate charter school authorization; and
 - Approval and review of LEA allocations generated through the BEP.
- Question: When will the draft SBE agenda be released?
 - **RESPONSE:** The Department has not seen the SBE agenda yet, but it is in development. The State Board will have time to share more information during this call on Wednesday.