



January 21, 2022

Dear Director Thomas,

Thank you for your waiver submission on January 21, 2022.

The commissioner of education may consider waivers related to of the provisions of Tenn. Comp. R. & Regs. Chapters 0520-01-03 and 0520-01-13 related to remote instruction to the extent necessary to allow students affected at the classroom or school level by COVID-19 isolation or quarantine to participate in remote instruction. As stated, your district still has the authority to quarantine students and staff on an individual case-by-case basis (not in the aggregate). Waivers will only be considered when a LEA can document and demonstrate a significant impact of COVID-19 quarantine or isolation on school operations, impacting students, teachers, and/or staff. Please note, if a waiver request is granted to a school, all extracurricular activities for that school must also be cancelled for the duration of the waiver period.

The waiver submitted by **Knox County Schools** for Austin-East Magnet School is **approved** at this time.

If not already in place, the department also continues to encourage all districts to implement as many mitigation strategies as possible to contain the spread of COVID-19, limit quarantines, and remain in-person, such as utilizing:

- The same or enhanced mitigation strategies used last school year such as temperature checks, physical distancing, frequent handwashing, etc.
- Seating charts in all settings, including classrooms, cafeteria/meals, bus routes, etc.
- Proactively stocking non-perishable items for breakfasts/lunches to account for meal staff absences
- Cohorting students to limit close contacts
- The consideration of masking

I continue to be incredibly grateful for the work of your district, educators, students and families as we collectively address and respond to COVID-19.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Penny Schwinn".

Penny Schwinn, PhD, MAT
Commissioner, Tennessee Department of Education

Local Education Agency Waiver Request Application: COVID-19 Relief

Upon application by the local education agency (LEA) for one (1) or more of its classrooms or schools, pursuant to Tenn. Code Ann. § 49-1-209 (d), the commissioner of education will consider waivers of the provisions of Tenn. Comp. R. & Regs. Chapters 0520-01-03 and 0520-01-13 related to remote instruction to the extent necessary to allow students affected at the classroom or school level by COVID-19 isolation or quarantine to participate in remote instruction. This waiver process is not required for individual students on quarantine.

Waivers will only be considered when a LEA can document and demonstrate a significant impact of COVID-19 quarantine or isolation on school operations, impacting students, teachers, and/or staff. Please note, if a waiver request is granted to a school, all extracurricular activities for that school must also be cancelled.

Please submit completed applications to Commissioner.Schwinn@tn.gov. Following review by the commissioner or designee, the local education agency will be notified in writing if the waiver request application is approved or denied. If approved, the waiver will only be valid for seven (7) calendar days. If conditions warranting a waiver persist, then the LEA may submit additional waivers.

Knox County Schools

Local Education Agency

400 W. Summit Hill Dr.

Knoxville

37902

Street

City

Zip

Director of Schools (Signature)

Date

1. Number of **classrooms** for which you are requesting a waiver: _____

Grade of Classroom	Name of School	In Quarantine or Isolation					
		# of Teachers	% of Teachers	# of Staff	% of Staff	# of Students	% of Students

Please explain why this waiver is necessary and in-person instruction is not feasible at this time:

2. Number of **schools** for which you are requesting a waiver: 1

Name of School	In Quarantine or Isolation					
	# of Teachers	% of Teachers	# of Staff	% of Staff	# of Students	% of Students
Austin -East Magnet High School			20	30%	174	26%

Please explain why this waiver is necessary and in-person instruction is not feasible at this time:

We are requesting a waiver for the week of Jan. 24-28, 2022.

Austin-East High School has been impacted significantly with both student and staff absences due to illness during the last few weeks. The district has closed Jan. 18-21 due to weather and staffing challenges related to illness. As we plan to return to school, staff absences related to illness projected for next week are still significant at our school. With 20-30% of staff absent and low sub fill rates, it creates a hardship on teachers and administration to provide class coverage, maintain effective sanitation protocols, and to provide quality and effective instruction.

Currently, based on reported and projected staff absences for the week of Jan.24-28 we have:

67-Total Staff (certified/classroom)
20 total staff projected out (30%)
17 unfilled vacancies (85% unfilled)
1-3 subs (available to fill if not sick)

For the past two weeks, we have averaged 19-25 staff absences each day, with only 1 to 3 subs available to fill. We have 4 vacant regular education positions and 2 sped positions that require permanent coverage by staff and subs in addition to staff absences related to COVID, quarantine, and other illnesses each day.

We are covering as many classes as we can with teachers on their planning period and combining multiple classes in the auditorium and gym. We have run out of teachers who can cover classes. Administrators and support staff are covering classes, managing cafeteria during lunch, and handing discipline and support as needed.

We have 4 CDC-A classrooms; however, due to a vacancy and COVID related illnesses, we have managed with 1 CDC-A teacher and one other special education teacher. We have averaged 2 – 3 educational assistants that have been absent due to illness.

The nurse and school administration have been tracking all the notifications we have received, and we have a 24% staff absent rate due to COVID related cases, quarantine, flu or illness (that we have been informed of). However, numbers could elevate as our nurse is in contact with staff who are symptomatic, been tested, and awaiting results. Staff absences do not include additional call ins that may occur the night before or morning of return to school.

Our total enrollment is 674 students. Our student absences averaged 150+ last week in school. The week of Jan. 10-14 we have had the following student attendance counts. Student numbers were trending up.

1/10-Monday- 19% absent
1/11-Tuesday- 20% absent
1/12-Wednesday- 22% absent
1/13-Thursday- 20% absent
1/14-Friday- 26 % absent (174 students out)

We are diligent about keeping accurate student attendance; however, with so many staff out, the possibility for error increases. Just when we think that we might be recovering, additional staff and/or family members get sick impacting and extending dates of return.

Teachers have been expected since the beginning of the school year to maintain and place work assignments in Canvas so that students would have a consistent platform to find their work whether in person, or at home due to illness. We will use our Administrators, department chairs and instructional coaches to provide support to teachers to ensure we are prepared for students to access both Canvas and virtual learning platforms. We have dedicated time during our staff meetings and our job-embedded professional learning to making sure that teachers are trained, supported and can transition comfortably to remote learning if needed. Thank you for your consideration of our request.