

Email to School Administrators
April 1, 2020

From: DESE Communications
To: School Administrators
Re: COVID-19: 4/1 Webinar Follow-Up Information

School Leaders,

Please see the message and information below as a follow-up and/or recap to this afternoon's webinar.

Commissioner Thanks School Leaders

Once again, thank you for the leadership you have been demonstrating throughout this unprecedented time. As the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) and Commissioner Vandeven have expressed, you are responding to this situation and supporting your communities in the most remarkable ways. Each one of us are making the best decisions we can make with information available at that moment in time. DESE is working as quickly as possible to provide you the information you need to make those decisions, while allowing school leaders to remain focused on the safety and well-being of students and staff members.

School Closure Update

Thanks for keeping DESE informed on your school closure updates. Currently, three districts have elected to close for the year. Many districts/schools have extended closures through the end of the month already, and many other districts/schools are, at this time, scheduled to resume classes on Monday, per the Governor's order on March 21.

As you likely heard or read Monday, while Governor Parson has not yet given specifics, he indicated that his order directing statewide social distancing will be extended. As the March 21 executive order did, a revision to that directive will change the date that schools can resume classes. Please begin planning accordingly. At this time, DESE does not anticipate an announcement related to the end of the school year; we expect the closure announcement to be incremental in nature.

We continue to field questions about what criteria will have to be met to resume school, or what the end of this school year will look like if we resume classes for only a couple of weeks. That question is being debated at the national level right now, so DESE will keep you informed. Many end-of-year decisions will be made at the local level, but DESE understands and appreciates that a consistent approach will be helpful for everyone.

As we shared previously, please continue to share any changes to or extensions of your school closure with your DESE Area Supervisor. They pass that along to department leaders so we can maintain those statewide records. If or when the Governor extends his order and that changes the date a district/school closure will end, you do not need to submit that date to your Area Supervisor. DESE will automatically update any school closures that were to end prior to the date the Governor's new order expires.

Coronavirus Aid, Relief & Economic Security (CARES) Act Relief Package

As noted in today's webinar, DESE does not have specific details about the CARES Act at this time, so there are many questions we cannot yet answer about the new legislation. When information is released from the U.S. Department of Education, DESE plans to host another webinar to share this important information quickly and clearly with school leaders.

School Finance

Review information shared in [Administrative Memo FAS-20-002](#), sent to public school leaders on Friday, March 27.

Assessments & Graduation Requirements

DESE officials have examined the impact of cancelling spring 2020 testing, specifically on local education agencies and 2020 graduating seniors. [Read the new guidance and information here.](#)

Bright Flight Scholarship

The Department of Higher Education and Workforce Development (DHEWD) has issued guidance regarding Bright Flight Scholarship requirements for ACT or SAT scores. The following is quoted from DHEWD: “. . . in response to the adjustments made by ACT and the College Board, DHEWD is extending the date on which 2020 seniors may achieve a qualifying ACT score for the Bright Flight Scholarship to the July national test date. The 2020 seniors who achieve a qualifying ACT score on the July national test date and who are otherwise eligible can receive the scholarship. Scores achieved on the July 2020 national test date will also be considered when determining eligibility for this year's sophomores and juniors, as has always been the case. Accommodations for the 2020 seniors taking the SAT will be announced as information becomes available from the College Board.”

The complete statement from DHEWD regarding Bright Flight Scholarship and ACT or SAT scores can be found [here](#).

Special Education FAQ

The DESE Office of Special Education developed a [Special Education Compliance COVID-19 Question and Answer Guide](#). The compliance team utilized information from a variety of resources, including guidance documents posted by other states and national organizations as well as questions received from Missouri educators serving special education students.

Food & Nutrition Services

Several new nationwide waivers were released from USDA this week, giving district/schools even more flexibility in serving meals to students during school closures. This includes changes in the requirements for meal patterns, times meals can be served and students being present to pick up meals. View the list of waivers in the “School Food and Nutrition Services” section of the [DESE COVID-19 webpage](#).

For households with children who attend a school that's closed and who would otherwise receive free or reduced-price meals, an application is being developed to provide a meal-replacement benefit through SNAP under the Families First Coronavirus Response Act of 2020. This new Pandemic Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) provision can compensate families for the cost of the meals their children are missing out on because their schools are closed. USDA is providing guidance to state agencies on plan

requirements in order to receive approval. DESE will share information and application details as soon as they are available. Read more from USDA about the [Pandemic EBT here](#).

Technology & Internet Access Survey Results

Thank you to the nearly 350 leaders who responded to the Technology/Internet Access Survey we released last week. At this time, the majority of respondents feel they are sufficiently reaching students, with over 60% reaching students daily and over 70% weekly. However, nearly 20% of respondents feel they are not reaching their students at all. The greatest need identified by respondents, as DESE expected, is access to the internet. DESE is currently working with partners/organizations to find and share solutions to this issue. Parent support/education, professional development for educators and access to hardware were noted as other needs among districts/schools.

DESE has seen and heard about a number of creative solutions districts/schools are using to work around these issues, including:

- Delivering hot spots to students' homes or placed on buses that are parked strategically in the community
- Strengthening WiFi devices at school buildings, so they can be used outside the buildings or in the parking lots
- Providing paper packets or documents on USB drives for students with internet access issues
- Printing assignments and educational materials in the local newspaper
- Using open channels on media provider platforms, such as Spectrum, to deliver educational content
- Providing instructional content on local TV access channels or PBS

The [FCC E-Rate Gifting Rule Waiver](#) recently issued enables RHC and E-Rate Program participants to accept free broadband connections and devices for remote learning during COVID-19. DESE encourages districts/schools to contact your service provider to see what solutions they may be able to offer.

Childcare for Healthcare Workers & First Responders

As we previously communicated, the Governor's Office worked with DESE as well as the Departments of Health and Senior Services, Public Safety, Social Services and Corrections to identify childcare gaps that may exist for critical health care professionals and first responders in Missouri communities, in hopes of developing plans to help provide the needed childcare for these important public servants. Information was collected for children from a list of eligible entities to assess the demand that exists. There were over 2,200 children identified that are in need of care or supervision so their parent or guardian can perform their critical job duties during the COVID-19 crisis.

Families provided information about their resident school district. For those school districts that were identified, DESE Area Supervisors are reaching out to school leaders this week to ask districts/schools to determine what they could do to help these families in their community, should they be approached. If the district/school is able to help, DESE will immediately provide districts/schools with contact information for those families. Because schools continue to receive their payments from the state during this time, there is no additional state funding allotted for this service. However, the state is exploring options and seeking federal guidance within the newly-passed CARES Act to determine what financial assistance from the relief package may be available.

DESE realizes the logistics necessary to offer childcare will require creative solutions and planning. While providing services is optional, it is our hope that staff members will offer their service, knowing they are doing so for the greater good of their community. It may be a good idea to work with other districts in the area to develop a regional approach to address this critical need. Teachers, paraprofessionals or substitute teachers could fulfill these roles.

Virtual Social-Emotional Learning

DESE's School Counseling section has provided virtual social-emotional learning resources and links for students and families. [The two-page document](#) provides information from national partners for online and offline use.