



## NEWS RELEASE

For additional information, please contact David Jespersen by phone (402-471-4537) or email ([david.jespersen@nebraska.gov](mailto:david.jespersen@nebraska.gov))

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# NEBRASKA OFFERS UPDATED GUIDANCE FOR SCHOOLS

As the number of confirmed COVID-19 cases in the state rises, the Nebraska Department of Education (NDE) is sharing additional guidance for schools. In all recommendations, the priority remains the safety and well-being of all students, educators, staff, and community members.

### **Alternate Learning Environments and Continuity of Learning Plans**

The NDE is now recommending that all schools remain in alternate learning environments, with no students reporting to schools, through the remainder of the 2019-2020 school year. With this recommendation, each public school district is required to submit a Continuity of Learning Plan. This plan will describe the temporary actions that support the continuation of teaching and learning for all students during the interruption of normal school attendance center operations. The information submitted will help the NDE tailor support to schools for the remainder of the school year and throughout the summer. Continuity of Learning Plans are due by Friday, April 3.

### **E-Learning**

The NDE advises districts to continue student learning using available resources. The NDE Office of Teaching, Learning, and Assessment has compiled virtual educational resources that are available on the [E-Learning Days web page](#), and will continue to add resources as they become available.

### **Special Education**

The NDE advises districts to continue to provide special education services following federal guidelines. The United States Department of Education (USDOE) recently provided guidance that schools should not opt to close or decline to provide distance instruction, at the expense of students, to address matters pertaining to services for students with disabilities. More guidance on special education is available on the [Office of Special Education's website](#).

### **Staff Needs**

The NDE asks all districts to address the needs of staff and their families. Staff may still go into school buildings, if needed, but should follow social distancing guidelines and proceed with caution and care. Recommendations for working in a school setting can be found at <https://www.education.ne.gov/publichealth/resources/>.

### **Nutrition**

Food insecurity for students who rely on school meals is a major concern when extended school closures become necessary. The NDE was granted approval from the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) for alternate meal service flexibility in the case of extended closures. This allows schools to serve students meals through USDA-approved meal service options, at approved sites within the community. All schools with a student population of more than 50 percent free and reduced priced lunch have the opportunity to provide meals through the Summer Food Service Program whether or not they have participated in the program in the past. Those schools will first need to complete an application and questionnaire. Once approved, schools will be able to provide these meals to any student, regardless of their enrollment. Schools with a student population of less than 50 percent free and reduced priced lunch can provide meals to low-income students in their school on a limited basis through an application. For more information, or to apply, visit the NDE Nutrition Services page at: <https://www.education.ne.gov/ns/>.

## **Graduation**

The NDE advises schools to continue instruction and learning with the expectation that students will be prepared to advance at the end of the year. That expectation includes seniors preparing to graduate. Teachers generally know which students are on track and which students might need additional assistance, and can focus on providing the necessary help to ensure graduation.

## **Assessment and Accountability**

On March 25 the state of Nebraska received a waiver from the USDOE for 2019-2020 assessments, accountability, school identification, and reporting requirements as originally planned, due to extensive school closures. Last week the NDE suspended all statewide assessments (NSCAS) for the school year.

## **Policy and Rules**

Rules and regulations should not be the priority during this time. Districts should focus on making decisions based on the well-being and safety of students, staff, and the community. Commissioner Blomstedt has pledged to waive requirements on instructional hours, due to the coronavirus.

The NDE will continue to interpret state and federal laws, policies, rules, and regulations and will provide more guidance to schools moving forward.

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*David Jespersen*  
*Public Information Officer, Nebraska Department of Education*  
402-471-4537  
*david.jespersen@nebraska.gov*  
*@NDE\_News*