

CREATING
OPPORTUNITIES
FOR STUDENTS TO
KEEP WYOMING
STRONG

MEMORANDUM NO. 2020-115

TO: School District Superintendents
FROM: Jillian Balow, Superintendent of Public Instruction
DATE: July 28, 2020
SUBJECT: COVID-19 Guidance Updates



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COVID-19 GUIDANCE UPDATES

Superintendent's Updates:

Health guidelines

All health practices such as wearing masks and social distancing are fully within the purview of the State Health Officer and local health officers. The Wyoming Department of Education's (WDE) role in mentioning health practices is simply to provide assistance to local school districts as they prepare to operate this fall. Anything in the Smart Start Guidance related to health practices that is inconsistent with a current or future local or state health order is to be disregarded in favor of the [prevailing health order](#).

Smart Start submissions

Superintendent Balow is asking for Smart Start plans in August so that the agency can plan for contingencies during the school year, such as a "hold harmless" from a funding reduction immediately if a health order closes schools for any duration. Superintendent Balow does not have the authority to prevent schools from opening simply because a district does not submit a plan. The agency is also asking for Smart Start plans so we can best provide support through professional development and technical assistance during the upcoming school year. Further understanding the individual Smart Start plans enables Superintendent Balow to advocate for schools as they continue to provide a quality education to all students.

Distance learning

Distance learning falls into three overarching categories right now - remote, virtual, and the new classroom-based virtual education ("CBVE"). The CBVE category is the WDE's attempt to be as flexible as possible under existing state statute. More on this later in this update.

Activities

The WDE has been working closely with the Wyoming High School Activities Association (WHSAA) and the Wyoming Department of Health (WDH) to issue activities guidance. WHSAA announced today their [guidelines](#) for fall sports.

Heroes Act

The Heroes Act passed the U.S. House of Representatives in May and is currently in the U.S. Senate. The Senate majority indicated they have an outline to begin working. It includes \$105 billion for education (\$70 billion for K-12). The funds will fall into two buckets. One-half of the money will be allotted by formula to schools for re-opening costs (PPE, cleaning, furniture, retrofitting, broadband). The second half will be used for grants to schools planning to reopen fully for in-person instruction. There is a long way to go still, but it should be a bipartisan effort from here.

Cloth Masks

A media release went out Monday from the WDE in collaboration with the WDH and the Wyoming Department of Homeland Security confirming that 500,000 cloth masks will be provided to schools around the state. These masks are in addition to all other PPE requests that the WDE has with Governor Mark Gordon's office. The masks will be delivered to each local county emergency manager, who will work with the school districts to coordinate the final distribution.

Smart Start Review

WDE staff has begun reviewing submitted plans based on the requirements in the [Smart Start Guidance Document](#). Plans are due Monday, August 3, 2020. The Smart Start Review Template can be viewed [here](#). Plans and questions can be emailed to laurel.ballard@wyo.gov.

Distance Learning Options

Remote Education, Virtual Education, and Classroom-Based Virtual Education remain options for schools to utilize as they deem appropriate for the 2020-21 school year. Further guidance is available [here](#). The application and assurance statement for Classroom-Based Virtual Education is now available on the [Virtual 307 Policy page](#).

Funding Update

Wyoming is receiving just over \$32.56 million in ESSER funding. The application is currently available to school districts in the WDE Grants Management System (GMS). These funds are available through September 30, 2022; contact [Jess Binning](#) with any questions. The GEER funding received by the Governor's office includes \$803,305 that is earmarked for school districts. The WDE will work with the Governor's office to distribute these funds as well through the GMS system. School districts will be notified when the application process begins. You can contact [Shelley Hamel](#) with questions regarding the GEERS funding. Finally, the WDE has requested \$42.2 million for technology, \$1.68 million for school nutrition and food service programs and \$7.26 million for Personal Protective Equipment. The WDE has received preliminary approval for all of these requests. All funds will be distributed pursuant to a signed Grant Agreement and must be expended by December 30, 2020. Further information on participating in this funding is forthcoming. For questions on this funding, contact [Trent Carroll](#).

Moving forward

A recording of this meeting is available upon request. The next COVID-19 Update with the WDE is set for 8:30 – 9:30 a.m. MDT on August 10. The WDE will continue to answer questions regarding operating under the current state health orders. WDE staff remain available by email or telephone to discuss any aspect of a district's adapted learning plan at any time.