

CREATING
OPPORTUNITIES
FOR STUDENTS TO
KEEP WYOMING
STRONG

MEMORANDUM NO. 2020-183

TO: School District Superintendents
FROM: Jillian Balow, Superintendent of Public Instruction
DATE: December 9, 2020
SUBJECT: COVID-19 Guidance Updates



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COVID-19 GUIDANCE UPDATES

Wyoming Department of Health (WDH) Update

Wyoming is experiencing high numbers of COVID-19 infection throughout the state, review current stats [here](#). Hospital capacity is being watched closely and the WDH is working with hospitals on staffing issues. Federal strike teams are supplementing where needed and the Wyoming National Guard is assisting with non-medical personnel. Wyoming residents can take advantage of free at-home testing [here](#). Currently 17 school districts are utilizing the Vault option and 10 are using Curative for surveillance testing. The WDH is also doing outreach through local Chambers of Commerce to share updates, and this collaboration has often included local superintendents sharing what is working in schools for the benefit of the business community. The Surgeon General is still calling schools one of the safest places for children to be at this point in the pandemic.

The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) has published new guidance for quarantine. Although the 14-day quarantine is still considered preferable, there are now two additional options: 10 days and seven days with specific negative test requirements. These new options do come with more risk and must be weighed carefully by each school district to determine what is best for its schools. Specifics for each can be found in the [guidance](#). The CDC will also be providing more guidance on antigen testing. When the WDH has sufficient data to have confidence in this testing, it will be used in Wyoming. The [Smart Start Guidance](#) will be updated periodically with any new information.

The WDH is gearing up to receive the first allotment of vaccine doses soon. Healthcare providers and long term care residents will be

the first recipients. After healthcare providers and long-term care residents, critical infrastructure workers will be in the next group to receive the vaccine. That group will include school staff. Currently, school nurses are covered under healthcare workers.

Alternative Schedules

The Chapter 21 Emergency rules for alternative schedules have been approved by the State Board of Education (SBE) and are currently awaiting approval by Governor Mark Gordon. These rules will allow schools to submit alternative schedule proposals for the 2020-21 school year while they are in effect. Any Alternative Schedule applications submitted will be considered by the SBE at its next scheduled meeting in January. Alternative schedules that propose fewer than 175 days of teacher-student contact in a given school year must be approved by the SBE. Districts interested in applying for an alternative schedule for the 2020-21 school year must submit an application, with all required documentation, to the Wyoming Department of Education (WDE). The application and a checklist of required documents will be shared in a Superintendent's memo when approval is finalized.

Accountability – Federal and State

The WDE is also waiting on the approval of the Chapter 3 Emergency rules, the Wyoming Accountability in Education exceptions that would allow the SBE to not make school performance ratings for this school year. The recommendation of the Technical Advisory Committee is to test to the greatest extent possible and the WDE is moving forward as such. The WDE is also working on an addendum request for federal accountability that will allow long-term goals to be delayed by one year and provide flexibility to not make federal identifications for support based on 2020-21 data. Public comment will be taken in January, including two live sessions on January 14, 2021. The WDE will administer all of the statewide summative assessments, although remote proctoring will not be offered. The goal is to have as many students safely assess this year as possible in order to calculate Student Growth Percentiles for next year. NAEP is postponed until 2022.

CARES Update

Updates were provided on the Governor's \$1.25 billion relief funding. The WDE has had 38 districts apply for additional grants. There has been approval of just under \$18 million for technology, parking lot wifi, and additional personal protective equipment (PPE). To date, 38 grant agreements with districts have been sent out for signature and 37 have been returned. Thank you for your quick response. Payments for these grants were executed on December 4, 2020. Most districts will receive their funds on December 9. These funds must be used by December 30, 2020, per the U.S. Department of the Treasury. This means they must be expended on goods or services that are delivered by that date, or a contract must be in place that includes terms of delivery by December 30, 2020. For more information, contact Trent Carroll, Chief Operations Officer, at 307-777-7720. The WDE is also reconciling and closing out monies used to acquire PPE through Amazon for school districts. If you receive an email or call from our office in the next couple of weeks regarding the delivery of PPE, invoice amounts, etc., please be as responsive as possible so we can maximize the use of these funds.

FY20 SPED Expenditures

Information has been sent to each school district on payments that are scheduled for this week for SPED expenditures. For more information, contact Leslie Zimmerschied, Accounting Manager, at 307-777-6000.

State ESSER Set Aside

The WDE has the opportunity to provide professional development using ESSER Set Aside funds. Details can be found in Superintendent's memo [2020-175](#). The training is free to school districts and will continue until the funds are depleted. Additionally, watch for an email announcing webinars for vendors sharing information about each professional development opportunity. Interest in each PD opportunity will determine if the vendor will be contracting directly with school districts or if the WDE will contract for the state as a whole. For the screening and progress monitoring tool, FastBridge, districts already under contract with FastBridge with a contract renewal that occurred after March 2020 can claim these funds for reimbursement or extension of the existing contract. Districts interested in establishing an initial contract with FastBridge are eligible to seek funding from the WDE for this purpose.

Smart Start Update

The WDE has received updated Smart Start Plans from some districts. That can be done at any time, as these are living documents. School districts must inform the WDE if they determine that they need to go fully online, Tier 3. If a school district or school is moving into Tier 3 due to a health order, a copy of that order must be provided to the WDE as well. The digital version of the Smart Start Guidance will be updated shortly, which will include the new quarantine protocol and guidance from the CDC. This document is meant to provide a framework for discussions and decision, while allowing the flexibility to address needs locally.

Snow Days and Alternative Instruction

The Chapter 41 Virtual Education rules allow for school districts to have an approved Classroom Based Virtual Education (CBVE) plan. Currently 38 school districts have been approved for CBVE. The Governor's order extends the Chapter 41 rules through the entirety of the health emergency plus 30 days. Most likely the remainder of this school year will be under the emergency rules. Schools may use traditional virtual education and CBVE to count attendance on those days instead of closing down. Going forward, when the emergency ends, during the 30 day window, the WDE and the Wyoming Attorney General's office will work on a path forward with permanent rules. For regular snow days, submit the temporary [school closure form](#) within two weeks of the snow day.

Moving Forward

A recording of this meeting is available upon request. The next COVID-19 Update with the WDE will be on an as needed basis. 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.