



Opportunity Through Education

Jillian Balow – *Superintendent of Public Instruction*

Wyoming Department of Education
122 W. 25th St., Ste. E200
Cheyenne, WY 82002
307-777-7675

MEMORANDUM NO. 2021-019

TO: School District Superintendents

FROM: Jillian Balow, Superintendent of Public Instruction

DATE: February 11, 2021

SUBJECT: COVID-19 Guidance Updates

COVID-19 GUIDANCE UPDATES

Wyoming Department of Health (WDH) Update

Wyoming has seen COVID-19 positive cases stabilize in recent weeks. The WDH had 44,897 lab confirmed cases, 7,730 probable cases, 624 COVID-related deaths. So far, 217,824 people have been tested and 512,378 total tests completed. The current rolling 14-day average positivity rate is 4.25%, which is down from a high of nearly 14% in November.

Both the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines were authorized for emergency use beginning in December. Wyoming has seen 80% of the first doses in the state administered, which translates to 57,063 people having received them. Additionally, 45% of the second doses received by the state have been administered. The WDH is working with CVS and Walgreens to provide vaccinations in long term care facilities, which has resulted in over 70 facilities having clinics so far. The clinics have led to the vaccination of over 1,200 staff and over 1,700 residents to date.

Supply does not currently meet the demand, requiring a prioritized approach by the WDH. There are currently 16 counties that have completed or are in progress with the first doses for school district staff, with seven counties scheduled to start either this month or in March. A toll-free number, 1-800-438-5794, has been established to answer vaccine related questions. Additional resources are the [CDC Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report](#), the [Incidence and Secondary Transmission of SARS-CoV-2 Infections in Schools](#) document, the [Data and Policy to Guide Opening Schools Safely to Limit the Spread of SARS-CoV-2 Infection](#), and the [WDH's Vaccine Administration Dashboard](#).

The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) will soon release an update on guidance for K-12 schools. The WDH does not anticipate any big changes to the core recommendations which include consistent and correct mask use, physical distancing to the extent possible, hand hygiene, disinfection, staying home when sick and contact tracing. Preemptive or surveillance testing are good measures where school districts have chosen to employ them. Research is showing that when these precautions are taken, transmission in schools is low.

There is the presence of variant COVID viruses in Wyoming and it seems to spread more easily than COVID-19. There have been five cases and all are in Teton County. The recommendations remain the same for any variant as they are for COVID-19.

ESSER II Update

The Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act (CRRSA), that became law on December 27, 2020 provided additional funding for the Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund (ESSER). The new funding, referred to as ESSER II, provides a state allocation of \$135,230,900. A minimum of 90% or \$121,707,810 is earmarked for LEA distribution based on FY2020 Title I, Part A methodology. These funds may be used for eligible pre-award cost dating back to March 13, 2020 and must be obligated by September 30, 2023.

Eligible uses include anything authorized under ESSER I and statutory language directs attention to expenditures related to “addressing learning loss, preparing schools for reopening, and testing, repairing and upgrading projects to improve air quality in school buildings”.

There is no Equitable Services component for school districts with ESSER II funds. Instead, CRRSA created the Emergency Assistance for Non-Public Schools, which will be authorized by Governor Mark Gordon’s office and implemented by the Wyoming Department of Education (WDE).

ESSER II funds must be tracked separately from ESSER I funds at both the state and local levels. Funds have been made available to the state to begin its process for implementation.

The team is in the process of creating a second grant for these funds in the GMS.

Firm allocation amounts for districts will be released soon. The state allocation is about four times the amount of ESSER I and districts could expect a similar calculation.

Accountability Update

The WDE has submitted its addendum to Wyoming’s federal accountability plan and a waiver request for annual targeted support and intervention. If approved, Wyoming would not make any identifications of low performing schools or student groups based on data from the 2020-21 school year. Both requests are currently under review by the U.S. Department of Education (USED) for approval. The State Board of Education was able to approve all the State accountability exception

requests during its January meeting, therefore there will be no School Performance Ratings for the 2020-21 school year.

Census Data and National School Lunch Program Applications

Wyoming's statewide poverty rate declined to 9.78% in 2019 compared to 11.36% in 2018. Based on the state's low population, Wyoming has less of a 'poverty share' which generally leads to a smaller Title IA allocation compared to other states. US Census data bears a two-year lagged pattern therefore 2018 poverty data determined the 2020-21 Title IA allocation and 2019 poverty data determines the upcoming 2021-22 Title IA allocation. Decrease in poverty rates between 2018 and 2019 led to a smaller 2021-22 Title IA allocation compared to 2020-21. Some LEAs received fewer National School Lunch Program (NSLP) applications during the 2020-21 school year and this impacts 2021-22 Title IA within-LEA rankings, allocations per attendance area, and equitable share. The meal pattern flexibility [fact sheet](#) dated January 4, 2021 from USED offers options for LEAs to alleviate fewer NSLP applications collected during the 2020-21 school year and will be discussed on Zoom calls on [February 16](#) and [February 18](#).

ESSER I State Set Aside

Per a [Superintendent's memo](#) in November, the WDE offered funding to support school districts in the following ways:

■ [FastBridge](#)

- Combines Computer-Adaptive Tests and Curriculum-Based Measures for universal screening and progress monitoring for reading, math, and Social-emotional behavior.
- Universal Screener-valid and reliable data for three screening periods (fall, winter and spring).
- Supports to identify and implement research-based interventions.
- Tool that can support MTSS.
- Schedule a demo through Illuminate Education.
- Funds must be obligated to districts for this by May.
- Contact Shelley Hamel to access funds.

■ [LETRS](#) Language Essentials for Teachers of Reading and Spelling.

- Professional development course focused on strengthening educator's understanding of the what, why, and how of literacy instruction based on the most current scientific research.

- ▶ The Challenge of Learning to Read.
- ▶ The Speech Sounds of English.
- ▶ Teaching Beginning Phonics, Word Recognition, and Spelling.
- ▶ Advanced Decoding, Spelling, and Word Recognition.
- ▶ Oral Language and Vocabulary.
- ▶ Understanding Reading Comprehension.
- ▶ Text-Driven Comprehension Instruction.
- ▶ Reading-Writing Connection.
- LETRS Third Edition for Elementary Teachers.
 - ▶ After school hours or Saturdays.
- LETRS for Administrators.
- Fall Kick-Off.
- Sign up for LETRS opportunities [here](#).

Virtual Program Student Assessment Venues

The WDE will assist with full-time virtual education programs to book venues for the statewide assessment, to ensure virtual students can be assessed to the extent possible. The WDE's Brittany Scherden will assist with these bookings and can be reached at 307-777-7624 or brittany.scherden@wyo.gov.

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, and WDE staff remain available by email or telephone to discuss any aspect of a district's adapted learning plan at any time.