

Delaware Department of Education Guidance for Tracking Attendance During School Building Closures Due to COVID-19: *A Focus on Engagement with Attendance Calculated for SY19-20 Through March 13, 2020*



Regular school attendance for students in grades K-12 is essential to learning and academic success. As a result of recent school closures and the decision to close school buildings through the end of the 2019-2020 school year, teaching and learning have rapidly shifted from daily face-to-face interactions in the classroom to remote learning in teachers' and students' homes. Everyone is adapting to new ways of delivering instruction and engaging students in the learning experience.

Remote learning poses challenges for all of us – teachers, students and families. One of the biggest challenges we face is keeping our students engaged, especially those students whose success relies on the additional supports, services and resources provided in the school setting. Some of the potential reasons for lack of engagement may include:

- **Access** - Many families have either no access to or very limited access to the internet, and there may be only one device in the house that in many cases must be shared between multiple people in the household. This is true for both teachers and students.
- **Competing responsibilities** - Teachers and students are juggling multiple responsibilities in the home. Some of our students are watching siblings while parents/caregivers are working, taking on additional household duties, and helping to provide for their families' needs during this time of financial stress and uncertainty.
- **Space** - If there isn't a quiet space in the home where students are able to focus on assignments or to participate in online class time without distraction, it may be easier to simply not connect or engage with the teacher. Similarly, teachers may also have limited access to quiet spaces in their homes, which can have an impact on opportunities to connect with their students.

Given these potential challenges, the Delaware Department of Education encourages school leaders and educators to focus on maintaining relationships with our students and with one another. During these times of social distancing and isolation, students and families may not have connections with or to others in the community and for those students who depend on school-based relationships to maintain or promote safety and well-being, the positive connections to you and your colleagues are ever more important. We encourage the following steps to staying connected to your students:

- **Communication** – Connect with ALL students and parents/guardians/caregivers (weekly or bi-weekly) to ensure their health, safety, and wellbeing, to hear about their experiences as well as to make sure they have access to pertinent information and resources and that they are prepared to support continued learning opportunities through the end of the school year. Make every attempt possible to connect with students who are not logging in or engaging in any learning opportunities. Collaborate with bilingual staff to contact parents/guardians/caregivers with limited English-speaking ability by phone, email, social media, or by mail in the language spoken at home.
- **Relationships** – Deepen personal relationships with children and their parents/guardians/caregivers and take time to understand how students and their families are experiencing their time at home, including possibly how students are connecting with learning (both school-provided remote learning and independent learning). Relationships have a dramatic effect on improving student engagement and can help identify areas of potential concern or need for additional support. If students are not participating in daily/weekly

lessons, school staff should make every effort to find out why this is the case and to let the student know that he or she was missed, and to seek information about how they can support the student. This communicates concern, empathy, a genuine desire to connect, and provides students a sense of continuity in a rapidly-shifting world. In a time of stay-at-home orders and social distancing, phone calls and emails are still basic ways to stay connected with students and their families. Work with your school's counselors and homeless and foster-care care liaisons to identify and connect with students who need the extra support.

- **Documentation** - Keep records of connections made during school closures as well as students' engagement with learning materials, assignments, virtual class time and virtual one-on-one office hours without negative consequences. For example, when learning is synchronous teachers could document engagement at the beginning of a lesson and again after an extended break, such as lunch. When learning is asynchronous, the completion of assigned material could be used to document engagement. Not all documentation needs to depend on visual confirmation. A wide variety of interactions could be used to document student engagement in any given day, from email communication, to survey completion, to telephone calls. Remember, grace and empathy are of utmost importance during this time. These records will provide valuable information to teachers next year regarding which students were able to participate in remote learning opportunities and which ones struggled to engage. This will also allow school teams to potentially identify additional support that might benefit students or their families, such as through school-based wellness centers, food assistance, or other behavioral health support.

Attendance

Districts and charter schools should continue to make every reasonable effort to promote and monitor student "attendance" as fully as possible in the continued educational opportunities outlined in each district and charter school's remote learning [plan](#).

The Delaware Department of Education recognizes that with these challenges comes difficulty in tracking attendance consistently, and the focus now should not be on unpredictable logistics. **Therefore, a student's attendance record for the 2019-2020 school year will be calculated from the first day of school until school buildings were closed on March 13, 2020. Moreover, calculation and reporting of the On Track Attendance measure of the DSSF has been waived for the 2019-2020 school year.**

Resources specifically developed for remote learning

Key Concepts for Leveraging Chronic Absence During the Coronavirus Pandemic:

<https://www.attendanceworks.org/chronic-absence/addressing-chronic-absence/key-concepts-for-leveraging-chronic-absence-during-the-coronavirus-pandemic/>

The following links were retrieved from <https://www.attendanceworks.org/coronavirus-resources-for-educators/>:

- **American Institutes for Research (AIR).** [Building Positive Conditions for Learning at Home: Strategies and Resources for Families and Caregivers](#). To support parents and caregivers in creating positive conditions for learning at home, this resource highlights four related concepts that are essential to consider: (1) adult readiness to support their child's learning; (2) emotional safety; (3) supportive spaces; (4) engagement in learning. Available in English and Spanish.
- **Parent Teacher Home Visits:** [Maintaining Relationships In A Time Of Social Distancing](#). PTHV is collecting a list of tools, resources, and inspiration for home visit practitioners as they navigate the "new normal" of state and local stay-at-home orders.

- **Inside SEL:** Inside SEL (Social Emotional Learning) has created a [list of resources, blog posts and guides](#) for Parents, Educators & School Communities Related to COVID-19.
- **The CASEL Cares Initiative:** provides guidance, guidelines, and resources to educators and parent/caregivers on building SEL during this time: <https://casel.org/resources-covid/>
- **The Search Institute's Building Developmental Relationships During COVID-19 Checklist** provides a set of actionable steps that educators can undertake in meaningfully connecting with youth: <https://www.search-institute.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Coronavirus-checklist.pdf>

News articles about COVID-19 and chronic absenteeism

- [Chronic Absenteeism in the Time of Coronavirus](#)
FutureEd, April 21, 2020
- [Present and accounted for? Closures create attendance challenges](#)
Education Dive, March 19, 2020

The following links require subscriptions to EdWeek online (edweek.org)

- [Ways to Handle Student Absences in Remote Teaching & When We're Back in School](#)
EdWeek, April 16, 2020
- [Responding to Absenteeism During the Coronavirus Pandemic & Beyond](#)
EdWeek Teachers, April 13, 2020
- [Maintaining Ties When School Closes Is Critical to Preventing Dropouts](#)
EdWeek, March 17, 2020