

## DELAWARE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

# SUPPORTING CONTINUITY OF LEARNING IN DELAWARE SCHOOLS

Dear Delaware district/charter educators and families,

In response to Governor Carney's decision [to close schools for students through May 15](#) and after conversations with districts, charters and the community at large, the Delaware Department of Education (DDOE) is issuing additional guidance regarding district and charter school remote learning plans. This guidance is to share statewide recommendations as educators and others continue to develop and implement plans to support students during this crisis.

When Governor Carney [announced the initial two-week closure](#) to help reduce the spread of COVID-19, he directed state, district and charter school leaders to use that time to plan for the possibility of extended closure. We appreciate the work you and your teams have been engaging in both as you draft your local plans and as you provide feedback to department staff developing statewide support. Department staff members also have been collaborating with colleagues in other state education agencies. I particularly want to thank our peers in Kansas, Massachusetts, Pennsylvania and the state of Washington for sharing resources with us. We are all facing an unprecedented challenge and are thankful to have thought partners across the state and nation to help us provide the best possible guidance and resources for Delaware educators, students and families.

During the early weeks of this crisis, school and state leaders have prioritized the health, safety, and wellness of our students, families, educators, and staff. With your help, we have been able [to provide meals to children](#) across Delaware and communicate the [social service resources](#) available to Delaware families. In addition, we have shared [learning activities](#) to support families now at home with their children.

We know remote learning cannot replace students' experiences in school communities with their teachers, administrators, and support staff members. I know you, too, are hearing from students and educators about how much they already miss learning and teaching in person as part of a school community. That said, we must all adapt – families, students, the community, and our educators and staff – to help students continue their learning.

Please note that the guidance below is a set of recommendations to guide remote learning and does not constitute a requirement for any district or charter school. We encourage this guidance to be used as a baseline or starting point that can be modified in collaboration with local stakeholders to fit their unique contexts, capacities, and needs. We recognize there is and will remain to be variation from one district or charter to the next.

I deeply appreciate all the educators, staff members and families who are diligently working to support students during these challenging times as together we respond thoughtfully and creatively to ever-changing conditions.

Sincerely,

Susan Bunting, Ed. D., Secretary of Education

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## Meeting the Needs of the Community

- The safety and well-being of students, families, and staff has been and must continue to be our top priority as an educational community.
- With school closures extended, districts, charter schools, and communities must engage students in meaningful and productive learning opportunities through an appropriately structured educational program.
- Delaware districts and charter schools must continue to support whole-child needs as well as the needs of the educational community. This includes students' physical health, safety and nutritional needs as well as the social-emotional and mental health needs of both students and educators, which could intensify during this time.
- Maintaining connections between school staff and students is paramount, particularly for the most-vulnerable members of our school communities. These connections will help guide districts and schools in addressing students' specific needs.
- Equity needs to be a top consideration in local planning efforts, especially as districts and charters make plans to manage an extended closure. This crisis disproportionately affects our most-vulnerable students, their physical and mental health as well as their academic outcomes.
- Districts and charters must focus on the critical outcomes necessary for the remainder of the year.

## Developing and Implementing Remote Learning Plans

- Districts and charter schools are best positioned to develop plans to meet their students' needs. [Remote Learning Plans](#) are due to Secretary of Education Susan Bunting by **April 3, 2020**. While preparing these plans, districts and charters will evaluate capacity and resources to support a remote learning model.
- Districts and charter schools that have already implemented remote learning plans may consider the recommendations in this guidance document; however, individual districts and charter schools can maintain local authority over their remote learning design.
- DDOE has created a [District and Charter Supports](#) remote learning document for educators. The decision to use other resources outside of existing primary materials and curriculum should be made intentionally and only as specific needs or obstacles are identified. This document will be updated regularly. Resources are meant to support teachers in providing instruction rather than as student activities.

## Remote Learning Considerations

- Remote learning is not synonymous with online learning. Remote learning can take place in a multitude of ways. Educators must be conscious of the effects of increased screen time and seek a balance between learning through technology and remote learning that happens offline to support students' curiosity and understanding.
- When implementing online options, districts and charters must ensure all online learning platforms meet confidentiality and student privacy standards.

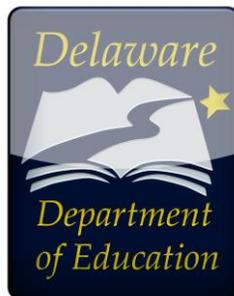
- To the extent possible, districts and charters should establish a singular communication platform, learning management systems, and content delivery methods (Limit diversity of options to create coherence across all ages).
- Examples of remote learning tools include large-group video or audio conference calls, phone calls, email, work packets, projects, reading lists, online learning platforms, and other resources to effectively engage with students. These tools could be used to deliver lessons, provide individual student support, provide resources (including instructional material and student assignments), connect students to each other and their teacher, and provide feedback on student work.
- 1:1 Live Video Conferencing with a student is not recommended. Please include additional adults or students for accountability and liability when video conferencing. Exceptions may apply to special education staff or health-related staff such as counselors, social workers, school psychologists and nurses, who would continue to follow their professional standards. Parent/Guardian permission is advised.
- Districts and charters should focus on reinforcing skills already taught this school year as well as applying and deepening these skills.
- In cases when teachers and students may wish to continue with new material, particularly at the high school level, districts and charters must consider equity of access and support for all students.

### **Components of a Remote Learning Schedule**

- Remote learning should take place via a combination of educator-directed learning and student self-directed learning.
- The individual student experience will vary depending on student age, individual and family needs, access and capacity for remote learning (including access to technology and internet), and the ongoing health of students, families, and staff.
- Educators should consider ways to focus on relationships and connections, not just content.
- DDOE recommends the following routine and structure for remote learning, recognizing the need for flexibility for individual districts and charters and the individual students within them:
  1. Provide opportunities to connect with one or more educators throughout the week. For students who are at higher risk of learning loss, such as students with disabilities or English learners, we recommend that educators provide additional opportunities for connection.
  2. Deliver academic content directed by educators, which should focus on reinforcing skills already taught this school year and applying and deepening those skills.
  3. Consider opportunities for physical and/or enrichment activities outside of the academic content.
- Educators, students and families should not expect that remote learning can replicate the traditional school day. Districts' and charters' remote learning schedules will vary. *The Kansas Department of Education's Continuous Learning Task Force* developed [Recommended Time Guidelines for Student Learning Based on Age](#) (pages 29-31) as an example of a possible remote learning school day.

## Grading Student Work

- To the extent possible, teachers should provide feedback on student work completed at home.
- The assignment of grades implies recording of student progress toward achieving standards (with existing or new content).
- If districts and charter schools have not already implemented policies regarding credit-bearing courses (determining credit for academic work at home), DDOE recommends that academic content be graded as “credit/no credit,” “pass//fail,” or “satisfactory/unsatisfactory” to incentivize continuous learning while acknowledging the challenging situation we face.
- Non-credit bearing courses, such as those for elementary and middle school students, can incorporate other incentives to keep students motivated to continue their learning.
- Before moving forward with any determinations of “no credit, fail, or unsatisfactory,” DDOE strongly urges districts and schools to consider whether the students have had equitable access to learning opportunities during this closure, keeping in mind the variety of technology, health, disability and language challenges that might exist.
- Grading decisions will vary to allow flexibility in meeting the individual district’s and charter’s policies, practices, and submitted remote learning plans.



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