



Illinois State Board of Education

100 North First Street • Springfield, Illinois 62777-0001
www.isbe.net

Darren Reisberg
Chairman

Dr. Carmen I. Ayala
State Superintendent of Education

Education-Related Guidance for Illinois Schools and School Districts Regarding Coronavirus/COVID-19

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ISBE is monitoring the rapidly changing coronavirus/COVID-19 health issue in our state, nation, and across the world. ISBE is working closely with the Illinois Department of Public Health (IDPH), Illinois Emergency Management Agency, the Governor's Office, the General Assembly, and stakeholders to address all education issues related to the virus. ISBE is actively updating this guidance as authorities learn more about the virus and its impact on the state.

As with any newly emerging infectious disease, knowledge evolves over time. ISBE strongly encourages districts to check these guidance resources frequently for potential updates.

1. Where can the most up-to-date resources and guidance on COVID-19 be found?

The U.S. Department of Education has resources linked directly to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) at www.ed.gov/coronavirus. Further, current IDPH resources can be accessed at dph.illinois.gov/topics-services/diseases-and-conditions/diseases-a-z-list/coronavirus. ISBE strongly encourages districts to establish open lines of communication with their local health departments.

2. Who would make the decision to close schools?

Local school districts, acting in accordance with guidance from IDPH and local public health departments, will make the final decision as to whether or not conditions require the closure of schools.

3. Are schools being advised to close at this time?

No. IDPH does not currently recommend closing schools.

4. Some districts have received requests from families wanting to “self-quarantine” their students with no proven medical reason. Should these students receive unexcused absences? Should such a student be labeled truant?

A parent may hold their student out of school for health and safety reasons. Each district is the ultimate arbiter as to whether the reason is truly a health/safety issue; however, these absences should not be counted as unexcused. Therefore, the student should not be labeled truant.

5. Do days for students absent due to COVID-19 count toward a district's chronic absenteeism rate?

Given the urgent and rapidly changing landscape due to the spread of the coronavirus, ISBE is working with stakeholders, the Governor's Office, and the General Assembly to ensure that

absences relating to public health emergencies are not counted toward the definition of chronic absence.

6. If a private special education school closes due to COVID-19, what obligations do enrolling districts have regarding special education students being served at the private special education facilities?

Students are placed in private special education facilities by their resident districts, which remain responsible for their placement and travel. Districts should coordinate and oversee any necessary transportation to ensure safety. A resident district that continues to operate schools without closure must serve all students, including students in private special education facilities.

7. Can districts exclude students, staff, or volunteers for 14 days if they present at school after having visited a region affected by the virus?

No. If a student, staff member, or volunteer presents at school with a fever, cough, or difficulty breathing after visiting an affected region, school authorities should immediately notify the local health department.

Districts cannot exclude or deny enrollment or education to students who are residents of the district due to travel considerations. Enrollment or exclusion decisions cannot be made using a student's travel history, and a district should not inquire as to a student's travel history for enrollment purposes. Decisions to quarantine students must be made by state or local public health officials. Districts must not apply standards that may be discriminatory for only one group of students.

If a student, staff member, or volunteer calls ahead and reports a history of travel to one of the affected geographic locations within the last 14 days and has concerning symptoms, collect detailed history over the phone prior to deciding the location for triage. School authorities should contact their local health department immediately.

8. What if schools have to close during the spring testing window? Will the state open a new testing window?

ISBE is aware of the potential disruption to the spring testing window and is in communication with the U.S. Department of Education on this issue. Additional information on this question will be provided in the coming days.

9. What are Emergency Days on a school calendar?

Emergency Days are included on the school calendar by districts for conditions deemed as emergencies that necessitate the closure all district school buildings. Typical uses of Emergency Days include severe weather conditions but would also include circumstances related to COVID-19. Emergency Days must be made up prior to the end of the school year.

10. What are Act of God Days on a school calendar?

An Act of God Day is a day that is used for a condition beyond the control of the district that poses a hazardous threat to the health and safety of the students. Act of God Days may only be requested after the district has exhausted all of its Proposed Emergency Days built into the proposed calendar. Act of God Days must be approved by the regional superintendent and the

State Superintendent of Education. Act of God Days count toward the required number of student attendance days in the Public School Calendar and are not required to be made up.

11. Can our district use e-learning days in the event that there is widespread transmission of COVID-19? Can the procedural requirements of e-learning be relaxed to allow for expedited approvals of e-learning plans and a greater number of e-learning days?

ISBE encourages every school district to develop an approved e-learning plan in preparation for a potential school closure. The district's e-learning program must be verified by the Regional Office of Education or Intermediate Service Center for the school district prior to implementation. The e-learning plan must account for providing appropriate learning opportunities to English Learners and students with disabilities and must account for students without access to technology at home. Please see www.isbe.net/Pages/Electronic-Learning.aspx for detailed information and resources.

The Illinois State Board of Education is proposing legislative changes that would allow for expediting the approval process for e-learning plans during a Public Health Emergency. ISBE is also proposing legislative changes that would allow districts to utilize e-learning days beyond their number of Emergency Days during a Public Health Emergency.

12. If e-learning is not possible for my district, what expectations are there to continue the educational environment while schools are closed?

Keeping students engaged in learning, especially in times of uncertainty, is of critical importance. Beyond e-learning days, if schools need to be closed for an extended period of time, school districts should take affirmative steps to work with their staff and communities to ensure continuity of education to children. All districts are strongly encouraged to continue providing educational supports, activities, and opportunities for students during school closures. Even though Act of God Days will not be counted as school days, districts can still provide for remote learning opportunities, provide take-home packets, and use other methods to keep students thinking about learning. Any student work completed during the closure of the school district must not be counted for grades or used in any way to impact a student's academic standing in the school district.

13. Can a district use e-learning for students who have been exposed and need to stay home for 14 days? Can we count e-learners as present for attendance?

E-learning days are meant to be used for districtwide events rather than for individual students. However, such a student might qualify for homebound instruction, completed strictly through telecommunications or the internet. Please see www.isbe.net/Documents/Home-Hospital_QA.pdf for more information.

14. Should students be going on international field trips at this time?

ISBE strongly urges all Illinois schools and school districts to re-evaluate any planned or anticipated travel. Further, ISBE advises all Illinois schools to comply with travel advisories from the U.S. Department of State and the CDC. Guidance from the CDC is being updated on an ongoing basis and currently recommends against traveling to China, Italy, Iran, or South Korea. The CDC also currently recommends postponing travel to Japan if you are elderly or have a chronic medical condition. ISBE advises districts to frequently check for CDC updates on travel

advisories. ISBE advises that trips to any countries with active advisories be postponed to a future date or canceled and replaced with another trip. Visit www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/travelers/index.html for more information on travel advisories.

15. Some students have been notified that travel agencies will not reimburse for field trips that have been canceled unless they involve restricted travel zones. What can be done?

ISBE drafted a letter that urges travel agencies to allow students to reschedule or cancel trips and receive a full refund. The letter can be downloaded from www.isbe.net/Documents/Letter-to-School-Districts-Travel.pdf.