



# Answers to Frequently Asked Questions Related to Specialized Programs and Services During the 2019-20 School Year

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## Online Learning

- 1. Some school entities are offering online support to parents to help children stay involved in their studies. How does a school entity assess if their households have the means to support online education or if they employ some other methods of instruction?**

Continuity of education options can take a variety of forms, including online/digital learning opportunities; non-digital learning opportunities (e.g., materials sent home with students); and other approaches designed in partnership with local Intermediate Units (IUs) and regional Pennsylvania Training and Technical Assistance Network (PATTAN) centers. The decision to employ one or more of these methods is made at the local level based on feasibility, availability of resources, access and equity considerations.

Whatever decision is made, schools must work to meet the needs of all students, with particular attention to free appropriate public education (FAPE) for students with disabilities and English as a second language (ESL) services for English Learners (EL).

- 2. How can schools support caregivers, foster parents, and group home staff to ensure students have access to technology and the Internet when schools use online learning?**

Numerous resources are available online to assist Pennsylvania educators with supporting online learning for students and caregivers:

- [School Guidance from the PA Department of Education](#)
- [Best Practices for Teachers \(PaTTAN\)](#)
- [Pennsylvania Association of Intermediate Units](#)

- 3. If a student does not have access to technology or the Internet, can a teacher provide in-person academic support at the student's home, if they adhere to safety guidance from the Pennsylvania Department of Health (DOH) and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)?**

No. The Governor's directive closing all public and private schools extends to in-person educational programming for students in non-educational placements such as in-home, residential facilities, detention centers, and hospital settings. Such programs may choose to offer continuity of education that does not involve in-person instruction in accordance with applicable standards and requirements, as addressed in other provisions of this FAQ. Only when a school is in the green phase can/should in-person instruction occur in accordance with state guidance.

## **Support for Students**

### **4. How are schools ensuring that a child with an Individualized Education Program (IEP) is receiving required services, such as speech therapy, occupational therapy, time for one-on-one reading, and math? How will the supports be provided to the students?**

Special education and related services may need to be adjusted through the IEP process. IEP teams should work to ensure that students are receiving appropriate services to the greatest extent reasonable and appropriate during the COVID-19 mandatory closure and ensuring alignment with aggressive social distancing guidelines. The mode of delivery might include schoolwork packets, online learning, or some other appropriate learning adapted to the student's needs and individual situation. Local education agencies (LEAs) should continue to follow local policies regarding changing or amending an existing IEP.

According to guidance from the U.S. Department of Education Office of Civil Rights, if an LEA continues to provide instruction to the general school population during an extended closure due to a disaster, but is not able to provide services to a student with a disability in accordance with the student's IEP, the student's IEP team, if feasible, determines which services can be provided to appropriately meet the student's needs.

### **5. Are Alternative Education for Disruptive Youth (AEDY) providers held to the same responsibility of assessing and documenting student progress every 45 days regarding a return to general education?**

Yes. If the AEDY program is continuing to provide a student's educational program, the AEDY program must follow the AEDY guidelines in effect prior to the COVID-19 school closure.

### **6. Should AEDY providers modify students' goals in the behavior plan to reflect their new setting?**

No. Regardless of the setting, students should work towards meeting the behavioral goals that address the behavior that initiated their placement in the AEDY program.

### **7. What are the Bureau of Juvenile Justice Services' (BJJS) expectations of providers currently providing Pennsylvania Academic and Career/Technical Training (PACTT) programming and their status for evaluations and certification?**

Evaluations conducted by BJJS for continued affiliation have been postponed until travel restrictions are lifted. Agencies in good standing will maintain their affiliation status until

such time that evaluations can occur. The PACTT staff will maintain communication with affiliates and offer their assistance remotely. Affiliates that are unfamiliar with remote learning methods are encouraged to work with their assigned PACTT consultant to incorporate distance learning methods. [Additional information is available on the Pennsylvania Department of Human Services website.](#)

## **Youth in Foster Care**

### **8. How can LEAs ensure school stability for children in foster care?**

During the COVID-19 school closures, LEAs continue to be responsible for enrolling and educating new students. As such, LEAs and local child welfare agencies should continue to complete the [Best Interest Determination School Placement Form](#).

LEAs are reminded that under the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) provisions, a child placed in foster care or experiencing a change in foster care placement should remain enrolled in the school of origin unless it is determined that it is not in the child's best interest to remain in that school.

[PDE's website offers additional guidance, technical assistance, and information about addressing the needs of youth in foster care during the pandemic.](#)

## **Continuity of Education**

### **9. Are private academic schools required to submit a continuity of education plan to PDE and post the plan on their websites?**

No. Act 13 of 2020 (Act 13) provides that private academic schools may not receive more or less payment from school entities for any student placed by a school entity provided that the private academic school is offering continuity of education during the closure. Act 13 defines "school entity" as: school districts, intermediate units, career and technical schools, charter schools, cyber charter schools, and regional charter schools.

Act 13 only requires a school entity, as defined by the Act, to post and submit a continuity of education plan to PDE. However, it is possible that school entities that place students in nonpublic or private schools may request continuity of education or other plans from those schools to include in the plans the school entity is required to submit to PDE. Nonpublic and private schools are advised to reach out directly to the school entities that placed students for guidance.

### **10. Are private academic schools required to follow the host district continuity of education plan?**

No, but private academic schools should communicate and work collaboratively with the host district to ensure students have the opportunity to receive continuity of education during the COVID-19 mandatory school closure.

**11. Several school districts have indicated learning is “optional” during the mandated school closure. Is that a way for districts to avoid the requirement of FAPE and state expectations? What happens to the students that choose not to engage in learning?**

During the COVID-19 school closures, all schools are expected to offer Planned Instruction for all grade levels as part of their Continuity of Education plans for the remainder of the 2019-20 academic year. Planned Instruction is formal teaching and learning similar to that which occurs in a classroom setting. Within this process, teachers use planned courses of instruction of new concepts/skills aligned to grade level standards.

Act 13 of 2020 requires each school entity to provide written notice to each parent/guardian of a student with an IEP, informing them of the school entity’s plan to ensure the provision of FAPE. School entities must provide special education and the related services in the IEP to the greatest extent possible during this time.

LEAs are not required to report student attendance to PDE during the closure, though they should take attendance for their local records. All LEAs are strongly encouraged to establish a process for tracking student learning and ensuring that all students are participating in continuity of education programming.

[Additional guidance, technical assistance and information about student enrollment and attendance during the pandemic is available on PDE’s website.](#)

**12. Can students take the high school equivalency test during the COVID-19 closures?**

The mandated school closure does not prohibit a student from taking the GED® or HiSET®. However, due the pandemic, testing centers may be closed. If an appointment has been booked, the individual will be notified via email that the test appointment has been canceled and a refund for testing fees will be issued. The test can be rescheduled when the testing site has reopened. For more information, visit the GED® or HiSET® websites.

**Graduating Seniors and Promotion to the Next Grade**

**13. Will PDE issue any guidance on criteria for students’ eligibility to advance to the next grade (particularly advancing to 12<sup>th</sup> grade and students scheduled to graduate) or will LEAs be advised to use their own review methods and discretion for these decisions?**

LEAs are responsible to ensure that students anticipated to move to the next grade level are able to do so. No student, including high school seniors, should be restricted from completing their current year course requirements due to the pandemic of 2020.

Select the “Graduation Ceremonies and Requirements” topic on [PDE’s COVID-19 School Guidance/Answers to FAQs page](#) for more information.

**14. Will summer school be an option for any senior who is at-risk of not graduating high school?**

Summer school is the responsibility of each LEA, but would be subject to any Commonwealth restrictions, closures, or social distancing recommendations that may be in effect at the time. Credit recovery programs may also be available. Chief school administrators should consider expense, ability and access for students when offering summer school options.

#### **15. What is PDE's guidance to schools concerning graduation and final grades?**

It is the responsibility of each LEA to ensure no student is unjustly restricted from completing their high school graduation requirements or pursuit of a postsecondary pathway due to the pandemic. Each LEA should review its current local graduation policies and procedures, including course, credit, and grade-based requirements, and make timely decisions related to whether the policies and procedures must be revised or suspended.

As a practice, each LEA should review the status of each senior to determine the extent to which the student is on-track for graduation and develop a plan for each student to complete local requirements, including career and technical (CTE) education programs, for the remainder of the 2019-20 school year..

Establishing and calculating credits for coursework is the responsibility of each LEA. If graduating seniors have not completed their classes for the year due to the closure, illness, family illness, or related COVID-19 issues, PDE suggests the LEA use discretion to determine whether the students have completed sufficient course content to satisfy the LEA's established policy for course completion and academic proficiency. PDE recommends that LEAs provide all reasonable latitude for students to graduate on time.

Select the "Graduation Ceremonies and Requirements" topic on [PDE's COVID-19 School Guidance/Answers to FAQs page](#) for more information.

#### **16. How can students get transcripts for college/scholarship applications and if needed counselor recommendations?**

LEAs are responsible for ensuring no student is unjustly restricted from completing their high school graduation requirements or pursuing their chosen postsecondary pathway due to the pandemic of 2020. Therefore, schools are expected to continue to process transcript requests, counselor recommendations, etc.

LEAs may want to consider noting on student transcripts or sending a letter along with transcripts that courses were abbreviated or grading policies were amended for the 2019-2020 school year, as a result of the pandemic, to aid a student's ability to enroll in postsecondary institutions after graduation or pursue other postsecondary pathways, including apprenticeships and employment.

Select the "Graduation Ceremonies and Requirements" topic on [PDE's COVID-19 School Guidance/Answers to FAQs page](#) for more information.

### **Residential Programs**

**17. How can LEAs ensure equal access to remote learning for children in group homes and residential placements?**

[PDE released a collection of free statewide resources to help all schools](#), including those without online platforms, those requiring additional technology support, and those that may rely on traditional methods, to continue educating students.

**18. What resources are available for residential placement providers to ensure continuity of education for children when schools are closed?**

[Resources for parents, families, and educators are available on the PATTAN website.](#)

**19. In secure or open residential treatment programs licensed by DHS/OCYF, what can be done to ensure continuity of education for children/youth?**

The Governor's directive closing all public and private schools for the 2019-20 school year extends to in-person educational programming for students in non-educational placements such as residential facilities, detention centers, and hospital settings. Such programs should offer continuity of education that does not involve in-person instruction in accordance with applicable standards and requirements, as addressed in other provisions of this document.

There are also staff considerations for providing educational services in residential programs. If the staff member is a public school employee of an LEA, or a staff member of a licensed private academic school, they may not provide in-person instruction during the COVID-19 closures. The contractual agreements between these organizations and their employees are not within PDE or DHS jurisdiction. Programs should consider the applicability of Act 13 and Act 15 to each arrangement.