

Instruction

Distance Education

Distance Learning Plan Due to Health- and Safety School Closure

This policy outlines Newtown Public School District's plan to provide distance learning options in the event that the school District must be closed due to an emergency health situation or a potential closing due to other safety reasons. This action plan allows District Schools to operate remotely while continuing to provide meaningful instruction to students through the use of a variety of instructional resources.

The Board of Education (Board) seeks to ensure fluid operation during a time when classes must be cancelled due to a health emergency or other situations related to staff and student safety as well as provide equitable access for all students. A distance learning day is a remote school day where students and staff have an opportunity to explore and engage in meaningful learning experiences that are: (a) aligned to the curriculum, (b) connected to standards, and (c) relevant to the current instructional sequence. While nothing replaces the genuine human interactions that happen authentically in the classroom between students and teachers, distance learning will support continuity of instruction in the event of a health and safety-related closure.

Distance learning school days will run as detailed in the section below entitled "Scheduling." The schedule will allow teaching staff adequate time to present the learning experience to support students as they (a) access information, (b) prioritize their day, and (c) communicate with their teacher(s). Teachers will be available during the hours listed below.

Goals of the Distance Learning Program

The Board, by its adoption of this policy, establishes the following goals for the distance learning program:

1. To ensure the continuity of instruction if and when emergency health or other safety situation negatively impacts the District's ability to maintain daily operations.
2. To continue to provide students with an authentic, meaningful, and comprehensive school experience aligned with current instruction and curriculum goals.
3. To ensure compliance with all federal and state statutes and regulations and Board policies and administrative regulations, as may be amended by state and federal authorities.
4. To facilitate ongoing academic and social/emotional supports for all students so they can be successful in a remote learning environment.

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Key Components of the Distance Learning Program

The Board, by its adoption of this policy, establishes the following key components for the distance learning program:

- 1. Equitable Access:** To provide equitable instruction, the District will ensure that all students and staff have access to instructional materials, electronic devices, and Wi-Fi.
 - a. Data about access to the Internet and the availability of digital devices for student and staff use at home is to be collected by the District. In the event that a student does not have access to a computer or Wi-Fi at home, the District will provide a device and/or a hotspot.
 - b. Information provided on District and/or school websites shall be available in a number of language choices.
- 2. Communication**
 - a. Communication regarding school closure and a move to distance learning will be sent to parents/guardians utilizing the District's emergency notification/communication system. Detailed instructions will also be posted on the school and District websites.
 - b. When possible, the school buildings may remain open for a portion of the day to allow staff and students to gather personal items and collect necessary learning materials.

- 3. Attendance**

The Board directs the Superintendent or his/her designee to develop a plan to verify and track student attendance as related to the provided distance learning activities. Parents/guardians must report the days their child(ren) are unable to participate in the provided distance learning activities due to illness or other specified reason. A means of reporting absences must be made available to parents/guardians.

- 4. Harassment, Intimidation, and Bullying**

During distance learning days, the District will adhere to all policies and procedures related to equity and diversity, harassment, and bullying.

- 5. Time Schedules**

During distance learning, teachers will respond to emails in a timely manner during the regular hours of school operation. Distance learning hours and school schedules (K-12) will be communicated to parents and posted on our District website.

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Key Components of the Distance Learning Program (continued)

6. School Nutrition Benefits

During emergency events where the District has activated a distance learning plan, and where these days are counting as regular school days, any student who receives free and reduced school lunch shall be afforded the opportunity to pick up a nutritional school lunch prepared by the food service provider/department. The schedule for availability and locations of pickup shall be posted on the District and school websites and communicated through the District's emergency notification system.

7. Resources to Support Instruction

The District shall utilize varied resources to support student learning. These include, but are not limited to, the following:

- a. The posting on the school's website a webpage devoted to relevant online resources and digital subscriptions.
- b. Teacher utilization of Google Apps for Education, District e-mail, and other online platforms for instruction.

8. Instruction: Student Responsibilities

- a. At the PK-4 level at minimum, students will be provided with meaningful learning activities in the core content areas and specials, when appropriate, through digital resources to be used at home. Print resources may also be used when necessary.
- b. At the Grade 5-12 level students are expected to log into their teacher's Google Classroom or other platform to identify the expected work for the day and may be asked to collaborate virtually with other classmates on assignments. Students without a school approved excuse will be held responsible for all work not completed by the assigned deadline. Deadlines will be assigned at the discretion of the classroom teacher and assignments will be returned either graded or with feedback in a timely manner.

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Key Components of the Distance Learning Program (continued)

9. Special Education

- a. The District will provide distance learning options to address the provision of appropriate special education and related services for identified students with disabilities. Programs and services shall be provided to students ages three through 21, in concert with the requirements of federal and state law; such requirements which may be amended by governmental action, with modifications that may be unavoidable due to the health crisis. It is recognized that the District may not be able to provide all services in the same manner as they are typically provided.
- b. Students will continue to receive provisions of their IEP requirements and will be provided with a free and appropriate program (FAPE) encompassing special education and related services to the greatest extent possible under the circumstances. What is appropriate and reasonable will include the individual child's circumstances as well as the circumstances related to the health and safety emergencies.
- c. Appropriately certified professional staff members will continue to implement these programs through distance learning opportunities. All special education programming will be consistent with the student's Individualized Education Plan (IEP) to the extent appropriate.
- d. All disabled students with an in-class resource center program documented in the IEP will be provided with modifications to meet their needs based on the distance learning options afforded to their general education counterparts.
- e. All students with pull out replacement center programs documented in the IEP will be provided with appropriate materials and instruction by their special education teachers to meet their needs based on the distance learning options appropriate to their IEPs and learning abilities.
- f. All students with self-contained programs documented in the IEP will be provided with appropriate materials and instruction by their special education teachers to meet their needs based on the distance learning options appropriate to their IEPs and learning abilities.

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Key Components of the Distance Learning Program (continued)

- a. The Board acknowledges that classroom and one-to-one instructional aides will not be available to support a student during a health-related closure.
- b. Related Services (Counseling, Speech-Language, Physical Therapy, Occupational Therapy): Counseling, Speech, Physical and Occupational Therapy activities will be provided to students by therapist(s) via emailed activities that have been individualized based on IEP goals. Additional activities will be scheduled and provided based on individualized needs.
- c. Speech language services and counseling services may be delivered to special education students through the use of electronic communication or a virtual or online platform, as appropriate.
- d. Out of District Programs: In the event that District schools are closed and private out-of-district schools remain open, students who are transported by a private company should attend school unless otherwise indicated by the out-of-district placement. In the event that the student is transported to the out-of-district placement by district transportation and the buses remain non-operational due to the closing, the parents will be asked to drive their child to the school and will be reimbursed for transportation according to Board policy for days the child is in attendance during this health-related closure.

In the event that District schools are open and private out-of-district schools are closed, the District will collaborate with the out-of-district placement to offer appropriate meaningful learning activities for completion at home.

- e. Referrals and Evaluations: Traditional timelines will be adhered to via the Supervisor of Special Services and meetings will be held remotely. The District will make every effort to ensure that evaluations are completed within the statutory timelines. Timelines may be impacted due to extended school closures. *(Days that schools are closed are not counted as "school days" for the initial evaluation timeline. The timeline pauses during the school closure.)* Child Study Team members will contact parents if evaluations fall outside of the legally mandated timeframes.
- f. Annual Reviews and Reevaluations: These shall take place once District schools reopen. Parent/Guardians and adult students may agree in writing that a reevaluation is not necessary. IEPs that lapse during the school closure shall remain in effect until a new IEP is developed. When school personnel and parents/guardians agree that a PPT meeting is necessary during the time of school closure, it shall be held via alternate means such as video conferencing or conference call.

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Key Components of the Distance Learning Program (continued)

- g. Due Process Hearings/Activities: The District will comply with and operate within any extension provided by the Commissioner of Education for all state statutory and regulatory time requirements related to special education due process activities.
- h. Communication: The District's special education staff shall provide information through a variety of methods, including family phone calls, emails, and video conferences. Also, at least one member of a child's team (special education teacher, speech therapist, psychologist) is to be in contact with the respective parent/guardian at least weekly (unless less frequent contacts have been requested).

10. Staff Responsibilities

The Board expects the teaching staff to be available through email and online between the posted times; to read and respond to emails during noted hours; and to adhere to all district policies as may be modified due to the nature and circumstances of the event; and to report any instances of students at risk, threats made, or any other meaningful information to District Administrators.

Paraprofessionals will receive instructions from the appropriate Supervisor of Special Services and/or their building Principals. Professional development modules via online programs will be made available in order to provide aides with ongoing educational opportunities.

District administrators will assist in the daily operation of all aspects of distance learning. In the event that the District is placed under general quarantine, administrative responsibilities will be determined by the Superintendent of Schools. Virtual planning meetings may be necessary.

11. Monitoring Student Engagement

The Board considers student engagement extremely important. It is important to ensure that all students are engaged and are connected to the resources they need. District and school administrators shall have regular connections with students and families. District and school staff shall check-in and confirm whether families have access to information and services; are safe and supported; and are prepared to support their child's learning through the District's continued learning efforts.

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Key Components of the Distance Learning Program (continued)

In order to monitor student engagement in continued learning, the Board expects the following actions to take place:

- a. Teachers and support staff are to connect with all students to maintain their relationships, assist with issues related to assignments, and encourage full participation in the continued learning opportunities. Connections should be documented and tracked as appropriate.
- b. Student support staff shall identify students who were chronically absent prior to the school closure/cancellation of classes or otherwise identified as needing additional support to determine if such supports can continue virtually. The option to refer a student exhibiting inadequate engagement to the District's team responsible for school attendance should be considered as necessary.
- c. School administrators and support staff are to reach out to students who are not signing into online learning or engaging in other continued learning opportunities. Families are to be contacted by school staff to ensure safety and well-being and connect students to the continued learning opportunities and technology they may require.

12. Grades

If required, the Board of Education shall approve revisions to the grading and reporting systems as developed by the administration and faculty and upon the recommendation of the Superintendent of Schools.

13. Compliance

Any distance learning days, and the state approval thereof, will comply with all federal and state statutes and regulations.

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- (cf. 0523 – Equity and Diversity)
- (cf. 3520.13 – Student Data Protection & Privacy/Cloud-Based Issues)
- (cf. 5131.81 – Use of Electronic Devices)
- (cf. 5131.911 – Bullying)
- (cf. 5131.913 – Cyberbullying)
- (cf. 5141.4 – Reporting of Child Abuse and Neglect)
- (cf. 6114.8 – Pandemic/Epidemic Emergencies)
- (cf. 6114.81 – Emergency Suspension of Policy During Pandemic)
- (cf. 6141.321 – Acceptable Computer Use)
- (cf. 6141.323 – Filtering Access to Electronic Networks)
- (cf. 6141.324 – Posting of Student Work/Photographs)
- (cf. 6141.327 –Electronic Resources)
- (cf. 6141.3291 – One-to-One Tablet Program)
- (cf. 6141.326 – Online Social Networking)
- (cf. 6141.328 – Bring Your Own Device)
- (cf. 6141.329 – Electronic Reading (e-reader) Devices)
- (cf. 6146.1 – Assessment Systems)
- (cf. 6156.2 – Off-Site Computer Use)
- (cf. 6172.6 – Virtual/Online Course; Distance Education)

Legal Reference: Connecticut General Statutes

10-221 Boards of education to prescribe rules.

18 U.S.C. §§2510-2522, Electronic Communication Privacy Act.

P.L. No. 110-385, Protecting Children in the 21st Century Act.