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Washington Office of Superintendent of
PUBLIC INSTRUCTION
Chris Reykdal, Superintendent

k12.wa.us

March 3, 2020

() Action Required
(X) Informational

BULLETIN NO. 014-20 STUDENT ENGAGEMENT AND SUPPORT

TO: Educational Service District Superintendents
School District Superintendents
School Principals
School District Business Officers
Special Education Directors
School Nurses

FROM: Chris Reykdal, Superintendent of Public Instruction

RE: Further Coronavirus (COVID-19) Guidance as of March 3, 2020

CONTACT: Martin Mueller, Assistant Superintendent, Student Engagement and Support
360-725-6175, martin.mueller@k12.wa.us

PURPOSE/BACKGROUND

Throughout the acceleration of the Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak in Washington state, the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) has been working in collaboration on the statewide response with the state Department of Health (DOH), the Governor's Office, the Emergency Management Division of the Washington Military Department, and many local school districts.

First and foremost, our guidance remains the same. Districts should be:

- Staying up to date with [current, accurate information from DOH](#).
- Sharing good hygiene practices and practicing routine cleaning and disinfecting procedures of commonly touched surfaces.
- Maintaining an open line of communication with their [Local Health Jurisdiction \(LHJ\) leadership](#).
- Communicating regularly with students, families, staff, and their communities.
- Intentionally and persistently combatting stigma.
- Actively engaging in contingency planning for the possibility of extended school closures.

The purpose of this bulletin is to provide additional guidance to school districts on the topics below as they relate to COVID-19:

1. Student attendance
2. Waivers for missed days and instructional hours
3. Distance learning

Previous guidance can be found on [OSPI's Novel Coronavirus webpage](#).

STUDENT ATTENDANCE

Many districts, parents, and guardians have expressed concern about student absences related to COVID-19 safety concerns. State law requires school administrators to excuse absences due to student safety concerns as well as absences due to illness, health condition, or medical appointment ([Washington Administrative Code \[WAC\] 392-401-020](#)). The WAC also provides districts with the authority to define additional categories or criteria for excused absences should the need arise.

We know that fears may be high as identified cases increase, particularly for families with loved ones living in the home who have a compromised immune system. Please exercise great caution before deciding not to excuse absences related to COVID-19 and starting the truancy process because of them.

WAIVERS

State law requires that school districts offer 180 school days and make available to students enrolled in grades 1–8 at least a district-wide average 1,000 instructional hours, and a district-wide average of 1,080 instructional hours for students in grades 9–12. However, OSPI is legally authorized to continue state apportionment support for school districts that cannot fully provide the required number of school days or instructional hours due to an emergency district-wide or school closure (RCW 28A.150.290(2)).

If a school district is required to or elects to close schools in response to the COVID-19 outbreak, districts should make every effort to make up missed time, including using scheduled vacation days and planned school closure days.

If and when it's needed, OSPI will file an emergency rule to allow the agency to waive the days and instructional hours that districts won't be able to make up. This rule will be in effect for the 2019–20 school year only. OSPI intends to require in the rule that school districts applying for COVID-19-related school day or instructional hour waivers must extend their school year through June 19.

Once a district has made efforts to make up missed time, they will be expected to submit an application for an emergency waiver to OSPI, as they have always done. This year, we will be

developing a web-based application for school closures related to COVID-19. As always, OSPI expects districts to hold off on submitting their request until they know the extent of the school closures (April and May are good months to send the application).

OSPI will waive school days and instructional hours for school districts that close schools due to the COVID-19 outbreak. Waiver requests will be approved whether state or local health authorities order the school closed, or if the school district reasonably determines that a school closure is in the best interest of the health and safety of its students and personnel. Districts should feel confident in knowing that if schools are closed for an extended period of time, they will not be required to make up missed days and instructional hours beyond June 19.

Please note, it is our expectation that districts will maintain their graduation timelines.

DISTANCE LEARNING

Some districts and schools may be in a position to maintain educational continuity using distance learning methods, and you may choose to implement these options. It is important to note that if educational services are being delivered to students in any form, for the district to remain open, those services must be provided to **all** students, including students who don't have access to technology at home and the continuance of a free and appropriate education to students with disabilities in accordance with their Individualized Education Programs (IEP). If students with disabilities are not provided services in accordance with their IEP, then they cannot be counted for continued state funding.

In addition, districts need to consider how distance learning will affect students who are eligible for free and reduced-price meals.

For most of you, it will likely make more sense to cancel school and/or district services and make up or waive missed days than to deploy a distance learning model that can be accessed by some, but not all, of your students.

OTHER REMINDERS

As this situation unfolds, please know that OSPI's Continuity of Operations Plan (COOP) includes provisions for ensuring ongoing apportionment payments and other school district supports in the event of emergency situations such as widespread infectious disease outbreak. School districts' COOPs and other contingency planning should include provisions to ensure payroll processes will continue in the event district operations are placed on hold.

In addition, if districts are experiencing school closures, they should follow their standard parent/guardian notification procedure: calls, emails, texts, contacting local news stations, and others.

INFORMATION AND ASSISTANCE

For general questions regarding this bulletin, please contact Martin Mueller, Assistant Superintendent of Student Engagement and Support, at 360-725-6175 or email martin.mueller@k12.wa.us. The OSPI TTY number is 360-664-3631.

For specific questions about attendance, please contact Krissy Johnson, Lead Attendance Program Supervisor, at 360-725-6045 or email krissy.johnson@k12.wa.us.

For specific questions about obtaining a school day waiver, please contact T.J. Kelly, Chief Financial Officer, at 360-725-6301 or email thomas.kelly@k12.wa.us.

For specific questions about online learning, please contact Nicole Gonzalez, Manager for Online Learning, at 360-725-6058 or email nicole.gonzalez@k12.wa.us.

For specific questions about Alternative Learning Experience, please contact Anissa Sharratt, Manager for Alternative Learning, at 360-725-4954 or email anissa.sharratt@k12.wa.us.

For specific questions about special education, please contact Glenna Gallo, Assistant Superintendent of Special Education, at 360-725-6075 or email glenna.gallo@k12.wa.us.

For specific questions about civil rights compliance, please contact OSPI's office of Equity and Civil Rights at 360-725-6162, 360-664-3631 (TTY), or equity@k12.wa.us. For relevant guidance regarding how schools can protect civil rights during an outbreak, see the U.S. Department of Education Office of Civil Rights [Fact Sheet](#) released during the 2014 Ebola outbreak.

This bulletin is also available on the [Bulletins and Memos](#) page of the OSPI website.

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Student Engagement and Support

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