

## Introduction

Below, we include information pertaining to the coronavirus pandemic and its effects on education. Because the situation is changing daily, this information should not be considered all-inclusive; rather, it is a snapshot of what we know at the time of this posting. As more information becomes available, Education Commission of the States will add to this page with relevant education policy information. If you are a state policymaker wanting to be connected to another state, please reach out to your [State Relations liaison](#).

Education Commission of the States tracks education legislation across all 50 states and the District of Columbia. Because of the influx of legislation addressing the COVID-19 pandemic impacts on education, Education Commission of the States now tracks the topic in both its [2020 State Education Policy Watch List](#) and [State Education Policy Tracking tool](#).

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### Federal Guidance

- Information on the federal government’s response to and resources regarding the coronavirus can be accessed at [coronavirus.gov](#), and a special landing page for schools and child care centers can be found [here](#).
- The Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act, which was signed into law March 27, had many provisions relevant to education and education policy. The full text of the act can be found [here](#), and [New America](#) has published a summary of its education provisions [here](#).
- The U.S. Department of Education has a landing page with coronavirus-related information at [ed.gov/coronavirus](#). To highlight a couple of resources, see [here](#) and [here](#) for guidance on providing services to children with disabilities during the outbreak; see [here](#) and [here](#) for guidance on assessments, accountability and ESSA; and see [here](#) for a press release announcing the temporary suspension of federal student loan interest and payments.
- The U.S. Department of Agriculture released a statement addressing “flexibilities to make it easier for children [and others] to get food during the COVID-19 national emergency and remove administrative roadblocks for the dedicated local staff who serve them,” available [here](#).

### Governors’ Executive Actions and State Guidance

- The National Governors Association provides a [resource page](#) covering governors’ actions across the states in response to COVID-19. This page includes a section on schools/childcare and universities.
- Below are examples of guidance from states on matters related to education:
  - **Alabama:** The state closed all public schools, starting March 18. The Alabama State Department of Education has many resources regarding coronavirus available on a landing page [here](#), including an [LEA Guide](#) and a [Parent Guide](#). Both guides include information regarding expectations for schools, student attendance, online learning and testing.
  - **Arizona:** All Arizona schools are closed through the end of the 2019-2020 school year. The Arizona Department of Education’s Office of Communications has posted [Guidance to Schools on COVID-19](#). Resources on that page include an [interactive map](#) showing where students can receive free meals and a [Virtual Resource Hub](#) for teachers and families “to assist them as they plan for non-traditional instruction.” The state also provided a Frequently Asked Questions document that addresses which schools are impacted by the closure, online learning, graduation, statewide assessments and student meals.
  - **Illinois:** The Illinois State Board of Education released Mandatory Statewide School Closure Guidance for Illinois schools and school districts, last updated on March 27. The document includes answers to questions regarding assessments and accountability; calendar and instruction/continuity of education; educator preparation and licensure; nutrition, meals, and food service; the scope of school closures; special education; and staffing. See [here](#) for extensive ISBE updates and guidance.
  - **Michigan:** With the state’s schools closed until at least April 5, the Michigan Department of Education has released a [series of memos](#) addressing potential concerns. The memos include information about [feeding children during school closures](#), [an update on student assessments](#) and [compliance requirements](#) of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act during a public health emergency.

- **Mississippi:** The Mississippi State Board of Education made policy changes that are described succinctly [here](#). Policy areas include graduation for the class of 2020, high school end-of-course assessments and educator preparation programs. Additional guidance and information are available [here](#).
- **North Dakota:** All public and private schools in the state are closed indefinitely. The North Dakota Department of Public Instruction has posted [School Guidance](#) that contains expectations and general guidance for schools, including, among other things, information on student well-being, how the closures impact special education, online learning, state aid to schools, teacher evaluations and professional development requirements, makeup days for school closures, student attendance, assessment and accountability, and school meals.
- **Washington:** All public and private schools are closed March 13 to April 24, subject to extension. The Washington Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction released [Guidance for Long-Term School Closures](#) on March 13. The released bulletin addresses allowable building activities, rulemaking, state and federal funding, assessments, federal accountability, special education, considerations for paid school staff, and meals and nutrition. It also includes contact information for any further questions individuals may have. Washington also compiled online resources for continuous learning that align with state learning standards [here](#). Additional information can be found [here](#).
- **Wisconsin:** All public and private schools in the state are closed from March 18 to April 23 following an executive order [closure extension](#). The governor has released a [Frequently Asked Questions](#) document addressing questions about instructional hours, student meals, supports available for students with IEPs, testing requirements, athletics, graduation, parent conversations with their students, pay for hourly staff, and whether school staff are prohibited from reporting to work. Additional information can be found [here](#).

## **Education Topic Areas**

### ***Remote/Virtual/E-Learning***

Switching to virtual education may be one method to reduce the spread of coronavirus, but this move also can cause challenges for students who are not able to access internet-based education. [Florida](#) provides an example of virtual education used in response to COVID-19. In recognition of increased reliance on internet access for many students participating in online learning, [some internet service providers](#) have altered their policies, raised internet connection speeds and eliminated data caps. Digital Learning has a resource from December 2019 called “eLearning Days: A Scan of Policy and Guidance,” available [here](#). Below, we include some relevant Education Commission of the States resources; provide examples of state policy; and include external resources regarding remote, virtual and/or distance learning.

- While Education Commission of the States has not completed a 50-state scan on this issue, this [Virtual School Policy Snapshot](#) provides an overview of state legislative activity from 2017 to 2019 and may be useful. The snapshot provides information in three primary areas: attendance and engagement, authorizing and governance, and funding.
- This [50-state scan on charter school policies](#) provides information on virtual charter schools.
- Although Education Commission of the States does not have a comprehensive resource on states that permit e-learning during extenuating circumstances (for instance, snow days or a health emergency), below we

provide several examples of related state policies. Note that while these states have a policy permitting e-learning for snow days, none appear to require it — so it may or may not be implemented at the district level in these states.

- While it is not in state law, the department of education in [Indiana](#) has adopted formal rules and regulations for its e-learning day program.
- **Ohio** has a [law](#) that allows districts to adopt a plan addressing online learning programs (“e-learning”) in the event of school closure.
- It also appears [Pennsylvania](#) had a pilot program to allow districts to permit students to complete work at home on snow days. It is not clear if the program continued beyond the 2017-18 school year.
- **Kentucky allows** schools and districts to offer nontraditional instructional days in lieu of school cancellations. The policy requires districts that wish to participate in the NTI program to submit a plan to the Kentucky Department of Education for approval. For districts that have yet to receive approval for an NTI program, they are able to apply for emergency approval to operate a program for the rest of the year. The Kentucky Department of Education released [guidance](#), last updated March 2020, highlighting three popular instructional approaches (p. 17-18) for NTI days, including:
  - Digital.
  - Project-Based.
  - Lesson Packet.

The guidance also outlined key methods districts can implement for students who do not have access to the internet or a device:

- Allowing students to check out or borrow a device.
- Pre-loading content onto a device or jump drive.
- Parking a Wi-Fi bus in the community.
- Using an internet switch that can be activated at the district.
- Opening school buildings for computer lab use.
- Sending staff to community locations that have internet/devices.
- Having agreements with a local utility company or internet service provider.
- Assigning project-based work.
- Alternating assignments/paper packets.
- **Minnesota requires** districts that wish to offer e-learning days in place of school closures to submit an implementation plan for approval by the Minnesota Department of Education that includes accommodations for students without internet or device access. According to guidance from the Minnesota Department of Education on accommodating students without a device or internet access: “All students must have similar learning experiences in terms of subject matter, task difficulty, and interaction with peers and their teacher(s). Tasks must be completed during the regular hours of the eLearning day. Students without access cannot be required to make-up the work on another day. Students may use physical texts or books and may handwrite their work, but those resources would have to be available at home. Teachers must contact students by telephone to conference with students, assess and support their learning.”
- **Pennsylvania** allows for [flexible instruction days](#) that can be online or offline. For districts that opt to use technology to offer remote instruction, [they must outline](#) accommodations for students and staff who do not have access to technological devices or internet in order to receive plan approval.

### ***Assessments and Accountability***

The U.S. Department of Education provided a [fact sheet](#) on March 12 regarding the impact of COVID-19 on assessments and accountability. The department and President Donald Trump [announced](#) March 20 that schools can

apply to [waive assessments](#) for the rest of the 2020 school year. Assessment HQ is maintaining a list of states' school closure dates, assessment status and the status of their waiver request (if any), last updated March 23.

### ***Instructional Time and Graduation Requirements***

This [50-state resource on instructional time](#) offers information that includes minimum day, hour or minute requirements. Although it does not specifically capture information regarding exceptions or waivers to these requirements because of emergencies (such as for an epidemic), many states make mention of such emergency provisions in similar or adjacent sections of code to those cited on [this page](#).

Several states have introduced legislation, published guidance or enacted new policies regarding graduation requirements for high school students in light of coronavirus disruptions. ExcelinEd maintains [a database](#) that includes, among other things, information on graduation requirements across all 50 states and the District of Columbia. Below, we detail recent policy changes in several states:

- In **Colorado** graduation requirements are currently determined by the district, which offers flexibility in the ability to adjust graduation requirements. The state department of education has [published guidance](#) to districts that suggests:
  - Giving credit for internships, work, and other extra-curricular responsibilities.
  - Waiving work-based hour requirements.
  - Alternative learning experiences, such as capstone projects.
  - Using [2021 graduation requirements menu of options](#).
- **Mississippi**: The state board has implemented the following changes:
  - Current seniors who meet all district and state requirements may graduate this school year.
  - The requirement that students take end-of-course assessments in Algebra I, English II, Biology and U.S. History has been suspended for seniors, as these cannot be administered in spring 2020.
- The **North Carolina** State Board of Education [announced](#) that seniors will receive a pass/fail designation (rather than a letter grade) for their spring courses based on their course performance as of March 13, the last day students were in school.
  - Board guidance also adjusts graduation requirements that currently state that no district can require students to earn more than 22 credit hours, the state's designated minimum. According to the press release, many school and district requirements exceed the state minimum. Details of the guidance plan can be [found here](#).
- **Ohio** [H.B. 585](#) (pending) directly outlines emergency graduation requirements in response to COVID-19.
  - The bill states: "A school district or school shall grant a diploma to or advance to the next higher grade any student who, on March 17, 2020, has completed all of the requirements to graduate as prescribed... or to advance to the next higher grade as determined by the district or school. If, by that date, the student has not completed all the requirements required to graduate or advance, the district board or school shall determine if that student may receive a diploma or advance to the next higher grade."
- Section 10 of **Washington** [H.B. 2965](#) (enacted) authorizes the state board of education to administer an emergency waiver program to ensure that students on track to graduate before February 20, 2020 are not negatively affected. The board of education, which [expects to adopt](#) the emergency rules by mid-April, may:
  - Adopt rules to allow schools to apply for waivers of high school graduation requirements.

- Waive provisions relating to credit-based graduation requirements.

### ***Special Education***

As noted in the federal guidance section, the U.S. Department of Education produced a [fact sheet](#) for students with disabilities. Below are examples of state-level guidance for special education.

- **Illinois:** The state board of education put forward special education guidance for Illinois schools and local education agencies, last updated March 18.
- **Massachusetts:** The Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education released an [FAQ](#) for schools and districts regarding special education, which was most recently updated on March 26 in light of the March 21 federal guidance update. This document provides guidance on such topics as district obligations to provide education to students with disabilities, state and federal timelines, and recommended educational resources for students with disabilities.
- **Virginia:** The department of education released a [memorandum](#) March 23, and most recently updated on March 30, on providing equitable access and support for a variety of student learning needs in preschool, elementary and secondary schools.

### ***Nutrition and Homelessness***

Although many states are shutting down schools as a method to prevent spread of the coronavirus, school closures can also bring about unintended consequences for students who rely on other services provided in schools, such as free or reduced-price lunches.

- On March 20, the [Food and Nutrition Service](#), within the U.S. Department of Agriculture, issued national waivers to the [meal time requirements](#), [non-congregate meal requirements](#) and the [activity requirement in after-school programs](#).
- [SchoolHouse Connection](#) provided on March 13 a [resource](#) with strategies for schools, early learning programs and higher education institutions that addresses COVID-19 and homelessness.

### ***Teachers***

As the situation evolves, issues continue to emerge around teacher certification and teacher pay. The [American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education](#) released [Educator Preparation Community Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) Response](#), which includes information from the national office, member voices and AACTE advocacy. Its [Coronavirus, States and Educator Preparation Programs](#) resource from March 20 offers examples from four states addressing education preparation program concerns. The Southern Regional Education Board also identified [policy areas](#) in which states may act to “ensure that current policies do not prevent student-teachers from graduating and becoming licensed to teach in the upcoming school year.”

On March 11, Brookings provided [information](#) on using federal stimulus to help during the pandemic, including teacher pay. Education Week has an [article](#) that discusses “this year’s statewide initiatives to increase salaries,” with an interactive map showing the status of some statewide teacher pay proposals.

Below are examples from states on teacher topics:

- [Mississippi](#): Candidates seeking admission to state board-approved educator preparation programs through the end of 2021 are exempt from the program entry testing criterion. Spring 2020 educator licensure candidates are exempt from the 12-week full-day student teaching requirement to become licensed.
- **Washington**: On March 19, the Legislature passed [legislation](#) pertaining to emergency teacher certificates, as well as provided a document with [related frequently asked questions](#).
- Guidance for teacher preparation programs has also been published in [California](#), [Iowa](#), [Kentucky](#), and [South Carolina](#).
- This [resource](#) discusses how some states have turned to alternative teacher certification to mitigate teacher shortages. Although this report is from 2016, some states may consider alternative teacher certifications in light of the coronavirus' impact on educator preparation programs.
  - Similarly, this information request [response](#) from 2019 provides examples of state legislation that allows greater flexibility in teacher licensing.

### *Early Learning*

Resources relevant to early learning responses to COVID-19:

- [Resources for Early Childhood Policymakers on Preventing and Preparing for Novel Coronavirus \(COVID-19\)](#), National Institute for Early Education Research
- [Latest COVID-19 Resources by State](#), Alliance for Early Success
- [Interim Guidance for Administrators of US K-12 Schools and Childcare Programs](#), Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
- [Policies, Practices, and Resources for Child Care and Early Education Providers Amid the Coronavirus Crisis](#), Urban Institute
- [Coping with COVID-19](#), National Association for the Education of Young Children

### *Postsecondary*

Resources relevant to postsecondary education responses to COVID-19:

- Crowdsourced, updating [list of higher education school closures and/or transitions to online-only classes](#). Last updated March 27.
- [COVID-19 Resources](#), EDUCAUSE
- [Higher Education Responses to Coronavirus \(COVID-19\)](#), National Conference of State Legislatures
- [Coronavirus Impacting Colleges and Universities](#) (continually updated), Education Dive
- [Handling clinicals, apprenticeships and more](#), American Association of Community Colleges
- [The Coronavirus and Test-Optional Admissions](#), Inside Higher Ed
- [Survey results: How enrollment leaders are responding to COVID-19](#), EAB

Below is an example of a postsecondary education policy response to COVID-19:

- **West Virginia**: The West Virginia Higher Education Policy Commission and Council for Community and Technical College Education voted to improve flexibilities for students, as summarized [here](#). Among other things, the commission approved suspending GPA requirements to renew certain scholarships and grants.

Similarly, the council suspended the community service and GPA requirements to maintain the West Virginia Invests Grant.

**Additional Resources**

- [Education Week](#)
- [National Conference of State Legislatures](#)
- [National Governors Association](#)
- [State Higher Education Executives Officers Association](#)
- [National Institute for Early Education Research](#)
- [Council of State Governments](#)
- [Center on Reinventing Public Education](#)
- [¡Colorín Colorado!](#)
- [Council of Chief State School Officers](#)
- [Child Trends](#)
- [Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education](#)
- [Hunt Institute](#)
- [EAB](#)