

Speeding Ahead: COVID-19 School Closures and Distance Learning

In the wake of school closures across the country, one of the ways many school districts have responded to stem the dramatic loss of learning time for students is to offer remote instruction, both online and through paper formats. As advocates interested in avoiding exacerbated achievement gaps in this time of crisis, we wanted to evaluate what states are doing and how quickly they have been able to mobilize in the face of unprecedented interruptions.

Below are some examples of how schools across the nation are addressing distance learning, and where each state falls in terms of the “speed” of their adoption of distance learning strategies.

Though not a comprehensive list, these states represent the range of efforts taking place at the state level. We will continue to provide updates in the coming days and weeks to include more states and up-to-date information on state initiatives.

SCHOOL CLOSURES AND DISTANCE LEARNING SPEEDOMETERS



SLOW TO MOVE



ON THE FAST TRACK

65 MPH

- [Rhode Island](#)
- [New York City](#)
- [New Hampshire](#)
- [Texas](#)
- [Florida](#)

50 MPH

- [Kentucky](#)
- [Kansas](#)

35 MPH

- [Connecticut](#)

- [California](#)
- [Arizona](#)
- [Ohio](#)
- [Washington](#)

25 MPH

- [Louisiana](#)
- [Virginia](#)
- [New Jersey](#)

5 MPH

- [Maryland](#)

Arizona (35 MPH)

- [3/17 Guidance](#)
 - **“School closure is NOT a complete shutdown of school operations and instructional obligations to students.** During school closures, staff are still expected to engage in work-related activities, and students and families are expected to meet the instructional requirements of their teachers and schools.”
 - **“School leaders, teachers, staff and parents must work together to plan for continuity in education and critical services during this time.** Specifically, during the closure, educators and community leaders are called on to: • **Continue to deliver educational opportunities to the extent possible** through remote learning and independent study, which may or may not include online learning or printed materials, among other options; • Provide school meals; and • Arrange for supervision of students during ordinary school hours.”
- [3/17 Webinar](#)
 - **“PEAs must ensure that, to the greatest extent possible, each student with a disability can be provided the special education and related services** identified in the student’s IEP developed under IDEA, or a plan developed under Section 504. Schools should take into consideration **alternate methods for providing educational services** to children with disabilities, such as home visits, teleservices, homework packets, or Internet-based lessons.”
 - **“Through this entire process, it is crucial that schools communicate frequently with families to think and plan about how best to meet the needs of their children** in what may be a chaotic and constantly-changing environment. These challenges can best be met together.”
- “Educator and Family Resources” tab has links to virtual learning options and an option for low cost internet. [Office of Communications](#)

California (35 MPH)

- [3/17 Guidance](#)

- "School districts, county offices of education, and charter schools (local educational agencies/LEAs) should immediately begin developing a plan for distance learning for their students and providing training and professional development for their teachers to implement the adopted distance learning strategy as effectively as possible."
- "Equitable access does not require that LEAs offer the exact same content through the same channel for all students. Instead of abandoning a promising e-learning approach because not all students will have equal access to it from home, the plan should include an analysis of alternate deliveries of comparable educational content."
- [3/20 Special Education Guidance](#)
 - CA is encouraging districts to be flexible and creative when it comes to delivering instruction to SWD.
 - "If the LEA can continue providing special education and related services as outlined in the IEP, or an agreed upon amendment to the existing IEP, through a distance learning model, they should do so. **The LEA can also consider alternative service delivery options such as in-home service delivery, meeting with individual students at school sites, or other appropriate locations to deliver services.** Further, LEAs are **encouraged to work collaboratively with Nonpublic Schools and Agencies (NPS/As)** to ensure continuity of services, including moving to virtual platforms for service delivery to the extent feasible and appropriate."
- CA is providing information on ways to access affordable internet [Educators' Toolkit](#)

Connecticut (35 MPH)

- [3/16 Guidance](#)
 - Wants districts thinking about longer term distance learning, rather than short-term supplemental resources.
 - "Do not wait for a perfect plan to be developed to start your distance learning."
 - Plans need to be approved by DOE, but these can be done retroactively to allow districts to move forward with distance learning as soon as possible.
 - Districts are expected to administer distance learning, but are not required to submit plans to the DOE.
- The Partnership for Connecticut donated over 60,000 laptops that will be provided to high school students in the lowest-performing districts in the state, which will help address the technology gap that exists in the state. [Laptops headed to students in struggling school districts so learning can resume](#)

Florida (65 MPH)

- [3/19 Q&A Guidance](#)
 - "Yes, although campuses are closed, school is still in session and students are still earning grades."
 - "Each student with an IEP, or 504 plan, **should be included in the school district's instructional continuity plan to the same extent as**

all other students. This plan may include virtual instruction, as well as virtual specialized instruction and related services **to the extent practicable.** All areas of the student's IEP or 504 must be considered. Any and all required evaluations, IEP meetings etc. may also be held virtually to the extent practical."

- [3/17 Guidance](#)
 - "To support students with identified IEP-related services who may have a disruption in services, school districts are given flexibility for the remainder of the school year to **provide alternative services or delay services until later in the summer months**, in coordination with a student's parents and IEP team."
- Schools have extended/early spring breaks to allow districts time to plan for distance learning. All schools are expected to be implementing distance learning by 3/30. Some districts started offering distance learning on 3/23. [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\)](#)
- All teachers were given the opportunity to participate in Online Teacher Training, given by the state's virtual school. [3/12 Press Release](#)
- FDOE is not issuing guidance to districts/schools about how to provide internet or technology, but their site does have options for free and low cost internet posted on their COVID-19 "[Family Resources](#)" page.

Kansas (50 MPH)

- Kansas is leaving most decisions in the hands of district officials, but there is an expectation that districts will provide distance education.
- [3/19 Guidance](#)
 - The state commissioned a Continuous Learning Task Force that released extensive guidance on ensuring student access to learning through the end of the year.
 - Guidance includes a five-day plan for schools and districts to develop an educational plan for students.
 - Created a survey for schools to send to parents regarding technology access.
 - Notes that internet connectivity WILL be an issue, provide potential resources for districts and families

Kentucky (50 MPH)

- All school districts are utilizing the Kentucky Department of Education's Non-Traditional Instruction (NTI) Program to ensure that educational services continue during the closure period. [Gov. Beshear recommends school closure period be extended until April 20](#)
 - Typically districts have to apply to use this system of instruction ahead of time, but this was waived due to COVID-19
- Superintendents have been advised to prepare at least 6 weeks of virtual content.
- [About NTI](#)
 - NTI is an existing structure in KY since 2014 due to extended weather-related closures across the state. (83 districts (48%) already were accessing this program in the current school year.)

- Instruction can be done digitally or in printed format
- NTI includes guidance for SWD and ensure students have access to technology/WiFi
- [New KDE task force will aid districts during COVID-19 closure period](#)
 - Task force developed to help districts provide the best instruction for students and better utilize NTI

Louisiana (25 MPH)

- [3/13 Executive Order](#)
 - Districts *may* provide distance education “as capabilities exist”
- Districts are currently not required to provide distance learning due concerns around equitable access to resources, services, and technology.
- [3/17 Guidance](#)
 - “School systems are not required to offer distance learning. Schools may offer complete distance learning, as capabilities exist. The required 63,720 instructional minute requirement per year shall also be suspended and minutes will not have to be made up.”
- LA is partnering with local PBS stations to provide educational programming and resources [At-Home Learning](#)
 - But this seems more intended for families and students to access in the absence of district learning opportunities
- LADOE is providing [links](#) to Tier 1 online resources for districts to use as they plan distance learning.

Maryland (5 MPH)

- As of 3/24, the state has issued no guidance regarding distance learning since closing all schools on 3/16. There is no mention of continuing education during closures anywhere on the DOE’s website.
- [3/11 Guidance](#)
 - Only K12 guidance currently provided on the MDOE website. Only provides basic information about the disease itself. Nothing about continuing instruction.

New Hampshire (65 MPH)

- [3/15 Executive Order](#)
 - Gov. Sununu ordered all public schools closed starting 3/16 and all schools needed to transition to distance learning no later than 3/23.
- [3/16 Special Education Guidance](#)
 - “Our approach is a **three-tiered safety net of support for students with an IEP**: 1) Services may be of a nature that they can be provided in a remote instructional environment. This may include, for example, daily “check-ins” with a student, which may be able to be provided seamlessly in a remote instruction model. 2) Another option may be to have a limited number of students (hence lower COVID-19 risk) continue to come to the school for those specific services. This might be OT/PT, or perhaps speech therapy or student counseling. You may determine that these students can come to the school building for these limited services only.

3) When services cannot be provided, the child can expect to receive compensatory services (to make up for the special education and/or related services the child missed), or A combination of any of these options.”

- [3/19 Press Release](#)
 - **“Many schools are providing laptops for their students. Comcast is offering free internet access for families that can't afford it.** And in areas with low broadband coverage, school districts are providing hard copies of materials. **Remote instruction does not necessarily mean online, and many schools are using analog methods.** school districts are working hard to provide remote instruction and support to students regardless of access to technology.”
 - “Some special education students will be able to receive support services in a remote instruction environment. Other services may require face-to-face, small group, or 1-on-1 delivery at the school or other location. These represent very low risk for the spread of COVID-19. For those students we cannot serve during this period, we will work with local districts to provide compensatory services.”
- VLAC, NH’s virtual charter school (already used by some students in most districts), is providing a series of free webinars for parents, students, and educators to ease the transition to distance learning. [VLACS offers free webinars for parents, students, and educators](#)
- NH has a new website devoted to remote learning <http://www.nhlearnsremotely.com/>

New Jersey (25 MPH)

- [3/13 Guidance](#)
 - Districts *may* offer distance learning, but are not required to do so.

New York City (65 MPH)

- [3/17 Guidance](#)
 - Expectation is that all schools will provide remote, digital learning for all students.
- [iPad distribution](#)
 - “To keep students connected and able to participate in remote learning, the DOE is lending 300,000 internet-enabled iPads to students. Priority will be given to students most in need. All devices are granted on a temporary basis and will later need to be returned.”
 - [Distribution started 3/23](#)
 - Paper packets will also be available online and at food distribution sites.
 - DOE is in communication with service providers to get free WIFI for all students.
- [Chancellor Carranza’s message to families 3/22](#)

- “There will surely be bumps in the road as we all adjust to this new reality, and I want to thank you for the patience that will be demanded of you as we undertake this transformation together.”

Ohio (35 MPH)

- [FAQs for Schools and Districts](#) (updated 3/23)
 - **“Schools should try to make a good faith effort** within available capabilities to support continued learning outside of school.”
 - “Since the desire is for schools to make a good faith effort to provide educational services within available capabilities during this period, **there should be limited impact on minimum instructional hours requirements.**”
 - “We have confidence in the creativity and flexibility of our educators to work together and with community partners to provide what makes the most sense in these situations. **At the very least, identifying local resources, encouraging reading and writing practices during this three-week period, and other enrichment activities** can be conveyed to students if no other options available.”
 - “If, however, a student with a disability cannot access the alternate delivery models being offered to general education students, then the district should consult with parents and/or caregivers to determine the needs of the student and **identify the most appropriate means for meeting those needs during the closure period.** In the interest of community health, districts should take steps to identify the most appropriate location for delivering those services, such as a daycare, home or other location. Compensatory services might need to be considered.”
- ODE does not provide information on how to access internet and/or technology via its COVID-19 web page.

Rhode Island (65 MPH)

- All districts and schools need to have distance learning plans. Schools were off the week of 3/16 to allow educators time to plan. Distance learning started Monday, 3/23.
- “Many states have thrown in the towel,” she said. “I’m not yet willing to throw in the towel. Some learning is better than no learning. I’m not going to sugarcoat it. It’s never been done before, not here and not anywhere in America. I think we’re ready to do it.” [Providence Journal](#)

Texas (65 MPH)

- [3/19 Press Release](#)
 - “TEA has already stood up an **Instructional Continuity Task Force.** We recognize that not all students have access to computers and Internet at home. With that acknowledged, there are still proven ‘low tech’ solutions (e.g. workbooks, homework packets, phone calls with teachers, etc.), that will allow students to get the instructional support they need during this time outside of the classroom. Our Task Force is working to **ensure all**

school systems have access to the resources they need to support instruction remotely, whether 'low-tech' or 'high-tech.'”

- [District Instructional Continuity Planning Overview](#)
 - TEA has provided (and plans to release in more detail) a 4-step process designed to enable district to provide long-term distance education
- Provides resources for free and low-cost internet access [Guidance to Districts on Providing Internet to Students](#)
- [3/20 Special Education Guidance](#)
 - “No defined or correct method”
 - Districts need to be “flexible” and “make reasonable efforts”

Virginia (25 MPH)

- [3/18 Guidance](#)
 - The state is taking a very cautious approach: “many school divisions are assessing the feasibility of providing online learning in the event of extended school closures. In looking at this option, it is important to consider the practical steps necessary to appropriately serve every student equitably and the extent to which a traditional school environment can be quickly replicated online. It is not a simple task, **nor is it one that should be attempted without serious consideration of equity and access**. Schools should thoughtfully evaluate their approach, understand their legal obligations, and maintain the standards for delivery of instruction and student supports.”
 - The state is providing little in the way of leadership or guidance. The only resources linked from VDOE are to a couple US DOE resources.
- [3/13 Press Release](#)
 - “The Department of Education is working closely with divisions to minimize disruptions to our students’ academic development by encouraging schools to provide students and families with educational resources throughout this time,” said Dr. James Lane, State Superintendent of Public Instruction.

Washington (35 MPH)

- [3/23 Guidance](#)
 - In a dramatic reversal from previous guidance (see below), OSPI now says that “Although schools are closed and are not providing traditional in-person instruction, **education must continue**. Further guidance will be **grounded in compassion, communication, and common sense; rather than the traditional compliance** measures we are all familiar with in our education community.”
 - “We should **avoid assuming that continuity of education outside of a typical school building can only occur through online means**. Districts will provide instruction using printed learning materials, phone contact, email, technology-based virtual instruction, or a combination to meet student needs.”
 - Districts need to start providing **distance learning by Monday, 3/30**.

- Provides “Guiding Principles” and a sample plan that districts can use as a model in preparation for distance learning.
- In a signal that states are beginning to share best practices, OSPI is direct districts to use Kansas’ [Continuous Learning Task Force Guidance](#)
- [March 20th guidance](#)
 - Gives options for ensuring HS seniors can obtain credits to graduate, including online classwork, competency-based assessments, and using dual credit and CTE courses as core credits. Also notes state credit waivers available for non-core classes.
 - OSPI is developing resources for SWD for participating in online environments, specifically for high school seniors.
- [3/17 Letter to Superintendents and Labor Leaders](#)
 - “Districts and their labor leaders should work together to consider modifications to the educational program, calendar, and employee responsibilities so they can deliver educational services to our students to the greatest degree reasonably possible. This will include considering how to satisfy graduation requirements and ensure equity in the delivery of services.”
- *Previous Guidance*
 - [Closure FAQ](#) (Updated 3/13)
 - “Schools should not be providing online learning services unless they can provide those services equitably.”
 - [Parent Guide to COVID \(Updated 3/7\)](#)
 - “OSPI believes that for most districts, it will make more sense to cancel school altogether than to organize a learning model that cannot be accessed equitably by all students.”