

State Special Education Advisory Committee (SSEAC)

Statement on Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19)

On March 23, 2020, Governor Ralph Northam ordered all K-12 schools in Virginia to close for the remainder of the 2019-2020 academic school year in response to the continued spread of COVID-19. Local educational agencies (LEAs) have been working feverishly to develop contingency plans to provide education to all students during the closure. It has been challenging for everyone making critical decisions to keep Virginians safe.

In response to the many questions from LEAs, parents, and advocates arising from the school closures, the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) has created a webpage, [COVID-19 and Virginia Public Schools](#). The webpage focuses on the increasing needs this crisis has created while also providing appropriate guidance to LEAs, parents, and advocates. Additionally, the VDOE has developed a frequently asked questions ([FAQ](#)) document to address challenges specifically related to students with disabilities. Both of these resources will be updated, as needed, to address new situations, additional information related to the COVID-19 pandemic, or guidance received from the U.S. Department of Education.

As to the provision of services during the COVID-19 pandemic, if an LEA offers general education services remotely and/or online, services must be equitably offered to all students. Students without access to the internet or technology, English learners, students experiencing homelessness, students in foster care, students in detention centers, students who require access to child nutrition programs, students receiving special education services, and other students who experience opportunity gaps, must have equitable access to the services needed in order for them to continue their learning outside of school. The State Special Education Advisory Committee (SSEAC) encourages LEAs and parents to continue working together in tandem with their community partners and the VDOE to consider ways in which remote instructional options can meet the needs of all students.

The SSEAC fully acknowledges the great deal of uncertainty that this extended school closure has on all stakeholders. As such, we encourage that everyone practice patience in these unprecedented times and rapidly changing circumstances. The SSEAC cannot reiterate how much this has generated an "all hands on deck" coordination of efforts. This global pandemic calls on Virginians to be creative in our approach, collaborate with one another, utilize our critical thinking skills, demonstrate good citizenship, and nurture all relationships through effective communication. We are all in this together and together we can overcome.

Nondiscrimination: The SSEAC reiterates the VDOE’s assertion that COVID-19 is not at all, connected to race, ethnicity, or nationality. School staff should be mindful that bullying, intimidation, or harassment of students based on actual or perceived race, color, national origin, or disability (including the actual disability of being infected with COVID-19 or perception of being infected) may result in a violation of state and federal civil rights laws. School divisions must take immediate and appropriate action to investigate what occurred when responding to reports of bullying or harassment. If parents and families believe their child has experienced bullying, harassment, or intimidation related to the COVID-19 outbreak, they should contact the school principal or division superintendent. Parents can help their child prevent COVID-19 related stigma and racism.

Additional Information and Resources:

Council of Administrators of Special Education

- [Novel Coronavirus 2019: Considerations for Special Education Administrators](#)
- [Navigating the COVID-19 Crisis: Considerations for Special Education Administrators webinar](#)

VDOE Guidance and Updates

- [VDOE Special Education and Student Services Frequently Asked Questions](#)
- [COVID-19 and Virginia Public Schools](#)
- [COVID-19: A Parent Guide for School-Aged Children](#)
- [For Educators #GoOpenVA: COVID-19 Extended Closing Resources](#)

These sites are updated frequently and the list of additional resources is continually growing.

US Department of Education

- [FERPA and Coronavirus Disease 2019 \(COVID-19\) Frequently Asked Questions](#)
- [Supplemental Fact Sheet Addressing the Risk of COVID-19 in Preschool, Elementary and Secondary Schools While Serving Children with Disabilities](#)

Commonwealth of Virginia

To reduce spread of misinformation about COVID-19, schools are encouraged to use reliable information from:

- [Centers for Disease Control](#) (CDC)
- [Virginia Department of Health](#) (VDH)

Other Resources:

VDOE–Special Education webpage: [VDOE Special Education](#)

VDOE–SSEAC Email: SSEAC@doe.virginia.gov

VDOE–Facebook page: [Facebook VDOE News](#)

VDOE–Twitter: [Twitter VDOE News](#)

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