



COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA

James F. Lane, Ed.D.
Superintendent of Public Instruction

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
P.O. BOX 2120
RICHMOND, VA 23218-2120

Office: (804) 225-2057
Fax: (804) 371-2099

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To Members of the Virginia General Assembly:

As you are well aware, on March 23, 2020, Governor Ralph Northam extended his order that all public and private K-12 schools in Virginia close in response to the continued spread of COVID-19 for the remainder of the 2019-2020 school year. While the health and well-being of students and staff remains the top priority, the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) also recognizes the incredible strain that the extended closures have placed on our communities. I write today with updates and information for you about how divisions are navigating these challenges, and the role that the Department of Education is playing as we seek to support division staff, parents and students.

We know that the learning time, academic support and ancillary services students receive at school are not easily supplemented or replaced. Understanding the desire and responsibility of parents and educators alike to provide continuity for every student in their thinking and learning, local school divisions are providing a variety of learning options including take-home packets, virtual learning, and office hours for teachers. Additionally, local school divisions are exploring options for new instruction through summer programming and integrating critical content into coursework next year. While this decision rests solely with the local school division, VDOE has encouraged schools to thoughtfully evaluate their approach based on community needs while understanding their obligations, and maintaining the standards for delivery of instruction and student supports.

VDOE has developed a variety of instructional resources and guidance to support parents, teachers, and local school divisions during this unprecedented time, including:

- [The Virginia Department of Education Frequently Asked Questions webpage](#) – The VDOE has compiled a list of COVID-19 FAQs for division and school-level administrators related to include school closures, Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and the Virginia Department of Health (VDH) guidance, school budget and finance, assessment and accountability, instruction, early childhood, special education and student services, school nutrition, data collection and technology, teacher education and licensure, and public meetings.
- [COVID-19: A Parent Guide for School-Age Children](#) – VDOE has created this guide to serve as a resource for parents, families, and caregivers on a variety of topics related to COVID-19 and their students.
- [Virginia Learns Anywhere](#) – In an effort to support Virginia educators, VDOE created the Continuity for Learning (C4L) Task Force consisting of teachers, leaders, and collaborating

educational partners across Virginia. The C4L Task Force has prepared [Virginia Learns Anywhere](#) which reinforces much-needed structure for students and empowers individual teachers to support students in learning remotely. The C4L Task Force encourages divisions to develop and implement continuous learning plans in partnership with local county health departments, families, staff, and local school boards.

- [Open Educational Resources](#) – VDOE has provided resources through [#GoOpenVA](#). #GoOpenVA is Virginia’s home for Open Educational Resources (OER). It’s a growing community of educators and education partners working together to help teachers personalize learning and address the learning goals of the Profile of a Virginia Graduate.
- [Emergency Child Care during Statewide School Closure](#) – The Department of Social Services and the VDOE are working closely together in this effort to support critical members of the workforce and provide safe child care alternatives for their families. This document outlines a variety of options and waivers which different public and private entities and communities should consider in order to provide safe child care alternatives for essential personnel while maintaining stringent health protocols to minimize the risk of additional COVID-19 spread.
- [Guidance from the Department of Special Education and Student Services](#) – This document provides school divisions and stakeholders with information and solutions around the provision of services for special education and student services.
- [Guidance on Graduation Requirements, Awarding of Credits, and Continuity of Learning](#) – The goal of this document is to provide school divisions with information and solutions around graduation requirements, promotion, new instruction, and ease of process.
- [Emergency Guidelines for Local Alternatives to Awarding Standard Units of Credit](#) – Approved by the Virginia Board of Education on April 2, 2020.
- [Emergency Guidelines for Locally-Awarded Verified Credits](#) – Approved by the Virginia Board of Education on April 2, 2020.
- [Guidance on Licensure of Instructional Personnel](#) – Issued March 30, 2020 via Superintendent’s memo
- [Joint Statement from the Virginia Department of Social Services \(VDSS\) and the Virginia Department of Education \(VDOE\) on education stability for children and youth in foster care during school closures due to COVID-19](#) – Issued April 13, 2020.

In addition to these instructional resources and guidance documents, VDOE has partnered with Virginia’s public media stations to broadcast teacher-led classroom instruction aligned with the Commonwealth’s academic standards starting Monday, April 13. “VA TV Classroom” offers instruction to students in grades K-10 who are unable to access other distance learning options due to a lack of high-speed internet. This instructional content will be aired from 1-3pm, Monday through Friday. During the week of April 27, “VA TV Classroom” will add a special hour from 3-4pm called “AP Prep Week,” with content provided by Virtual Virginia focusing on a different AP subject each day.

VDOE is also expanding access to the Virtual Virginia platform and content, as an option for standalone course delivery as well as a resource and vehicle for teachers to continue instruction. The expansion of Virtual Virginia will be especially helpful for teachers and students in school divisions without robust distance learning systems. School divisions may also leverage existing or create new partnerships with approved multi-division online providers to offer content to students virtually.

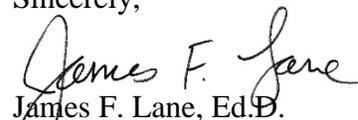
For students with individualized education program (IEP) in the public school, accessible technology may afford students an opportunity to have access to high-quality educational instruction during an extended school closure, especially when continuing education must be provided through distance learning. If a school division does begin to offer instructional services by alternative means the division will remain responsible for the free appropriate public education (FAPE) of its students eligible for special education services with an IEP. Once school resumes, the school must return to providing special education and related services to students with disabilities in accordance with the student's IEP, or for students entitled to FAPE under Section 504, consistent with any plan developed to meet the requirements of Section 504. Additionally, after an extended closure, divisions are responsible for reviewing how the closure impacted the delivery of special education and related services to students eligible for special education services.

Governor Northam's school closure order also required private day schools to be closed to combat the spread of COVID-19. The impact of the state of emergency on contractual arrangements with service providers through the Children's Services Act (CSA) remains a matter of local jurisdiction. VDOE has advised local school divisions to work with their local Community Policy and Management Teams (CPMT), local CSA office and partnering private schools to discuss this matter. The VDOE has also provided guidance to school divisions to carefully consider the provision of equitable access, services, and support for a variety of students including students who may be served by private providers. The Office of Children's Services (OCS) has also been clear in communication that funds are able to reimburse localities for services as agreed to by the local CSA program, local school division, and private providers. The VDOE and OCS have provided additional detail and the VDOE has publicly posted the [Joint Guidance for Student Placements Reimbursed by CSA](#) on the VDOE website. There is no issued guidance from VDOE or OCS that would serve as a barrier for providing services to students served in private settings.

We know this has been a difficult time for families, schools, and communities across the Commonwealth and throughout the country. We appreciate educators and school division leaders who are working tirelessly to help develop equitable and innovative approaches to continuing instruction that allows us to remain focused on maximizing the potential of all students. The health and success of all students in the Commonwealth remains a core value of the Virginia Department of Education, while also offering high quality support and guidance to local school divisions. If my team or I can answer questions or be of additional assistance, please don't hesitate to contact me at james.lane@doe.virginia.gov.

Thank you for your continued support during this challenging time.

Sincerely,



James F. Lane, Ed.D.
Superintendent for Public Instruction