



STATE OF CONNECTICUT
STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION



TO: Superintendents of Schools

FROM: Dr. Miguel A. Cardona, Commissioner of Education *MAC*

DATE: April 9, 2020

SUBJECT: Attendance Guidance and Ensuring Student Engagement during School Class Cancellations Due to COVID-19

Regular school attendance is essential to a student's education. School districts, consequently, devote significant resources to promoting strong school attendance. The importance of student attendance is also reflected in Connecticut's legal and regulatory framework, which offers ways to identify and remedy truancy and chronic absenteeism. In light of the COVID-19 pandemic and its impact on our school communities, the location of learning has shifted to students' homes, potentially increasing the resources needed for the otherwise straight-forward task of taking attendance.

Tracking Attendance

During the time in-school classes are canceled, school districts must make all reasonable efforts to have all students participate as fully as possible in available continued educational opportunities. Particularly for students without direct communication through digital access, but in all cases, a school district may find it challenging to determine the extent and duration of student participation.

The Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE) understands that attempting to compile statistics as to whether individual students are "in attendance" may be problematic. Therefore, the CSDE will treat a student's attendance record for the 2019-20 school year to be as it was on the school day before classes were canceled, i.e., March 20, 2020, supplemented by the student's attendance record if in-person school classes resume before a school district's scheduled closing date in June. A school district's resources are best spent in efforts to promote student engagement with continued educational opportunities, rather than focused on unreliable quantitative measures.

Monitoring Student Engagement in Continued Learning

While in-school attendance processes may change, student engagement remains paramount. Toward this end, during the COVID-19 disruption of school, district and school administrators should make sure that regular connections are made with students and families. District and school staff can check-in and confirm that all families have access to information and services; are safe and supported; and are prepared to support their child's learning through the districts' continued learning efforts. It is as important as ever to ensure that all students are engaged and are connected to resources that they need.

Districts may ask:

- **Teachers and support staff** to connect with *all students* to maintain their relationships, assist with issues and concerns related to assignments, and encourage full participation in continued learning opportunities. These connections should be documented and tracked as appropriate. Districts should be strategic about ensuring students do not get missed, particularly in secondary grades where there may be multiple teachers for the same student.
- **Student support staff** to identify *students who were chronically absent pre-COVID19* or *otherwise identified as requiring additional support*, and determine if the available pre-COVID-19 supports can continue virtually. **Teachers and other school staff** should have the option to **refer a student** who is exhibiting inadequate engagement to a **school or district team** responsible for school attendance in order to **coordinate across departments** and with **community-based organizations**.
- **School administrators and support staff** to reach out to *students who are not signing into online learning or engaging in other continued learning opportunities*. Families should be contacted by school staff to ensure safety and well-being and connect students to the continued learning opportunities and technology they may require. Resources previously available to schools and districts for students that were missing too much school should be engaged for students who are not connecting through distance learning.

Addressing Student's Overall Safety and Well-being

While rigorous efforts are encouraged to facilitate student engagement, lack of response to school contacts raises concerns about the overall safety and well-being of families during these challenging times. CSDE in partnership with the Department of Children and Families (DCF), share the considerations below to mitigate the risk of students being unsupported and in unsafe situations.

A call to DCF should be made only in those circumstances where you have a "reasonable suspicion" that child abuse or neglect has occurred. Although each family circumstance is different, lack of contact with a particular child during the COVID-19 crisis does not necessarily indicate child maltreatment. Yet, we do not want to lose sight of the concern if a child is in need of protection. Attached are the documents for filing a non-emergent report online, as well as an FAQ and guidance regarding DCF's operational definitions of educational neglect. Consider the following:

- In a situation when you have concerns regarding a student who is under the care of DCF/or the family is actively working with DCF, please contact the assigned worker. The DCF staff are teleworking and can be reached by accessing this [link](#) for their e-mail address. They can also be reached by their state cell phone. If you do not have that number, please contact the local office for additional information.
- A student's nonparticipation in continued education opportunities does not immediately constitute educational neglect and would not inherently warrant a referral to DCF. However, if there is evidence that the parent/caretaker has access to the necessary resources to participate, is responsible for the child's educational participation (defined as a child under the age of 12 or a

child is functionally dependent on a parent/caretaker), and multiple and diverse attempts have been made to engage the parent/caretaker/other resources without success, a referral to DCF may be warranted. In this situation, it is recommended that school staff make every effort to first outreach via phone calls and letters and access other individuals, such as the emergency contact, who knows the family and can assist you to make a connection. A parent/caretaker may need to prioritize a variety of needs to ensure safety, well-being and the overall functioning of the family unit, and if known, this should also be taken into consideration.

- Virtual engagement with a student should include a general assessment of their overall well-being. If a concern is raised that suggests that a child has been abused or neglected, or a child is presenting with a justified fear of safety in the home, a referral to DCF may be warranted. Age appropriate and solution-based safety planning, when appropriate, should also occur in your interactions.

The CSDE is issuing concurrent guidance on student data privacy issues related to virtual learning. Considering that guidance, but also the emphasis here on continued student engagement, CSDE recommends that districts review and ensure their “acceptable use” policies related to the school-issued technology, at least temporarily, allow for student and family access to the appropriate supports during this pandemic. Engagement with students may include use of those technologies to maximize access to age-appropriate student socialization, visual contact with staff members to maintain connection to the school community, provision of special education related services, and other necessary counseling and/or telehealth access.

June 2020 collection of the Public School Information System (PSIS)

The June 2020 collection of the Public School Information System (PSIS) will open as scheduled. As in previous years, the snapshot date for the June 2020 collection is the districts’ last day of school. Two critical elements reported in the June PSIS collection are the days of membership and the days of attendance for each student who is enrolled in the school on the last day of school. While districts may have developed their own attendance policies to track student participation in their continued educational opportunities, for purposes of state reporting through PSIS, days of membership and days of attendance should only be based on those actual “school-days” when students are expected to attend school in person. Please do not include any continued educational opportunities when tabulating the days of membership and days of attendance for the June PSIS collection.

Please consider these examples:

- The school canceled classes due to COVID-19 on March 11. As of that date, the school had been in session for students for 120 days. Alicia was enrolled in the school from the first day of school, and as of March 11, had attended 117 days. Presuming the school does not resume classes for the remainder of the school year, and that Alicia is still enrolled in the school on the last day of school, Alicia’s days of membership would be 120 and days of attendance would be 117.
- The school canceled classes due to COVID-19 on March 11. As of that date, the school had been in session for students for 120 days. Jacob enrolled in the school on December 2. As of March 11, Jacob could only have attended 60 days; and he attended 59 of those 60 days. Presuming the school does not resume classes for the remainder of the school year, and Jacob is still enrolled in

this school on the last day of school, Jacob's days of membership would be 60 and days of attendance would be 59.

As a reminder, students may enroll or register in your district at any point during the school year, including during this time. Please do not report membership and attendance data for students who enrolled in school after class cancellations due to COVID-19 and only had the opportunity to participate in distance learning, even if they were enrolled in the school on the last day of school.

As a result of COVID-19 and the extended disruption of classes, schools and families are learning new ways to engage in this partnership of educating students together. It is important to recognize that each district and family may be facing challenges in this work. Parents may be trying to assist multiple students in a home, while teachers may be also taking care of their own families.

It will take a village to strengthen these school-family partnerships. Every day we will get stronger in this work together. CSDE is here to help – please review the resources available at <https://portal.ct.gov/SDE/COVID19/COVID-19-Resources-for-Families-and-Educators>, and share them with your school communities. If you have any questions on the PSIS reporting of your students, please contact Kendra.Shakir@ct.gov. For other inquiries about this guidance, please contact [Kari Sullivan](#) at 860-807-2041.

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