

PRIORITY NOTICE: Updated Recommendations and Guidance from Commissioner Makin for Remainder of 19-20 School Year

Dear Champions of Education,

As you may know, US CDC guidance recommends an 8 to 20 week timeframe for avoiding large group/in-person instruction once there is evidence of community transmission of COVID-19. Therefore, I am recommending, with the support of the Governor, that you begin to plan to replace classroom/group instruction with remote/distance learning for the remainder of the 2019-2020 school year.

It is difficult to make such a recommendation, recognizing the profound challenge of reinventing public education and the many culminating events and rites of passage that educators and students anticipate all year long. I also realize that this recommendation will be difficult for families to hear, given the challenges of childcare and managing school expectations on top of the other significant impacts of this state and national emergency.

That said, I believe it is extremely important for school leaders to have as much information as possible in order to best prepare educators, students, and communities for a longer period of remote learning and to promote opportunities for redesigned celebrations and alternative ways to provide both continuity and closure.

Please know that you're not in this alone. The DOE team is available Monday through Friday – with daily "office hours" for discussing and sharing challenges and solutions; free professional development offerings; an enormous list of online and "unplugged" resources for every possible subject/content area, topic, and

grade level; and as many resources as we can make available to you and your schools. The schedule can be found here.

Here are some additional updates, requirements, and recommendations:

SAT and student grades:

As you know, the SAT was used as part of our ESSA accountability assessment system, and we have received a waiver exempting us from the ESSA assessments. We will not be requiring, nor offering, the SAT to this year's 3rd year high school students, and we intend to invite educators and school/school administrative unit (SAU) leaders to assist us as we redesign a state assessment system that will authentically measure school success and student achievement in a more useful and meaningful way.

We have confirmed that the SAT is not required for admission, nor will it be required as a screener for any program, at any Maine college or university. In addition, we are hearing that colleges and university across the country are following suit. **NPR reported about this last week.**

We also learned that UMS will be using a pass/fail system this year, including prerequisites for competitive and advanced courses, and that they recognize that students from the current cohort of applicants may also be receiving pass/fail grades. They are developing innovative and flexible admissions criteria and processes.

We have heard from many SAUs and schools who are using a variety of grading practices during this emergency education situation: some schools are maintaining grading practices, while others are implementing Pass/Fail. Some schools are only providing feedback instead of grades, and some are only including grades that improve a student's overall GPA or academic standing. Ultimately this is a local determination, however we would encourage SAUs and regions to discuss and determine a system that holds harmless students for whom conditions are outside of their control.

Enrolling new students:

There are many students whose families are experiencing housing disruption or changes during this COVID emergency, and we've had several calls regarding whether schools are expected to register new students if they move into a SAU. The answer is, "Yes." It is important to ensure there are directions that are publicly available on how new students can enroll during this pandemic.

Commissioner's Conference for superintendents:

We apologize for this inconvenience, but we will be postponing the Commissioner's Conference that had been scheduled to take place in June. We are looking for another date and will share this as soon as PRIORITY NOTICE: Updated Recommendations and Guidance from Commissioner Makin for Remainder of 19-20 School Year – Maine DOE Newsroom possible.

Providing meals during April Break:

We have applied for and received approval for a waiver that will allow for SAUs to continue approved Unanticipated School Closure meal service operations during April Break. You can claim reimbursement for meals served at approved sites over the break on the days of the week you have been approved to serve.

Continuity of Education Plans:

SAUs do not need to send us your plans – only the minutes from the board meeting at which your continuity of education plan was approved by your board – in order to receive the waiver on the minimum required school days. If you need assistance or resources for ensuring learning opportunities for your students, please reach out to the Department. A copy of the minutes should be submitted here.

Take care of yourselves and your people:

Unlike the well-defined grief of a definite and specific loss, the nebulous impacts from COVID-19 are disorienting and hard to describe; we're experiencing the loss of our basic and reliable systems and structures. While the economy, health care, and education systems are disrupted, and when the fabric of our social habits and traditions disintegrates into forced isolation, people understandably lose the comfort of predictability and control. I mention this here because it can be helpful to acknowledge grief for what it is and to remember that the process actually helps us to adapt to new conditions and to become resilient.

Collectively, Maine schools have provided a much-needed sense of security for students, families, and communities during this extraordinarily challenging time, and all of us at DOE continue to be in awe of your leadership and your commitment to providing the best educational services possible for your students.

As always, thank you for everything you do on behalf of your students and our education system!

– Pender
Pronouns: she, her, hers
Commissioner, Maine Department of Education
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April 23, 2020

April 22, 2020

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