
NEVADA DEPARTMENT OF
EDUCATION

PATH FORWARD PLAN
RESPONDING TO COVID-19

APRIL 28, 2020



NEVADA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION: RESPONSE TO COVID-19 AND A PATHWAY FORWARD

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Introduction

The Nevada Department of Education (NDE) serves approximately 29,837 licensed educators and 500,000 students within grades prekindergarten through grade 12. Nevada’s students are served within approximately 700 schools that span 17 school districts and the State Public Charter School Authority across 17 counties. Regarding Nevada’s students, nearly 60% are eligible for free and reduced priced lunch. Nevada’s largest school district, the Clark County School District, has more the 320,000 students enrolled. On the other hand, Nevada’s smallest school district, the Esmeralda County School District, has less than 90 students enrolled. These high-level statistics provide insight into the diversity of Nevada’s educational landscape and the need to for the NDE to provide differentiated support for educators and students as Nevada responds to the COVID-19 crisis and plans a pathway forward. This document encompasses three sections:

- Background: COVID-19 Response to Date
- For Your Situational Awareness
- Looking Forward: Ongoing COVID-19 Response

It is important to note that while the terms “school district” and “charter school” are used throughout the document, there are also instances when the term “Local Education Agency (LEA)” is used. For the purpose of this document, the use of LEA is synonymous with school district and charter school.

Background: COVID-19 Response to Date

Federal Waivers & Accountability

- On March 20, 2020, the United States Department of Education (USDOE) put in place a process for State Education Agencies (SEA) to request waivers of assessments, accountability, school identification, and reporting requirements established in the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). NDE received approval from the USDOE on March 20, 2020 for a waiver of certain accountability, assessment, school identification, and reporting requirements. A summary of the waived requirements is listed below.
 - The State does not need to administer its statewide assessments to all students, to make annual accountability determinations, to identify schools for support and improvement, or to provide data on its State and local report cards for assessment and accountability information.
 - Any school that is identified for comprehensive or targeted support and improvement or additional targeted support and improvement in the 2019-2020 school year will maintain that identification status in the 2020-2021 school year and continue to receive supports and interventions consistent with the school’s support and improvement plan in the 2020-2021 school year.
- On April 3, 2020, the United States Department of Education (USDOE) put in place a process for State Education Agencies (SEA) to request waivers of provisions related to funding within Title I, Title II,

Title III, Title IV, and Title V. NDE's request to the U.S. Department of Education to waive certain federal grant requirements was approved on April 7, 2020. Through this waiver, districts and schools are granted flexibility in the areas below:

- All districts are allowed to carry over more than 15% of their Title I, Part A funds – funds that service students from low income families – allowing our schools to continue to provide quality education to those students during this critical time.
- It provides an extension for districts to spend certain FY19/SY 2018-2019 federal funds until September 30, 2021 for programs necessary in each school.
- It allows our districts to use Title IV, Part A funds without spending limits on technology and without requiring an amendment of a needs assessment to do so. This means being able to explore unique methods of providing an education to students during this unique time in our history.
- It provides greater flexibility to districts and schools to provide short-term professional development for educators to meet their immediate needs. For example, professional development can support instructional practices, leveraging technology for distance learning programs, meeting the needs of English Learners, and supporting students with disabilities during this time.
- Our Office of Student and School Supports is currently preparing additional guidelines for districts and schools related to this waiver.

CARES Act

On April 23, 2020, the United States Department of Education (USDOE) released the application for State Education Agencies (SEA) to apply for Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) funds under the federally created CARES Act (2020). The purpose of these funds is to provide LEAs with emergency relief to address the impact of COVID-19 on elementary and secondary schools. Nevada received approximately \$117,000,000, of which 90% must be allocated directly to LEAs according to the 2019-2020 Title I methodology. Sub-recipients of ESSER funds receive a wide array of flexibility. However, LEAs must also comply with the authorized provisions of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. Examples of allowable uses of funds for school districts and charter schools include the following:

- Response efforts and preparation efforts related to COVID-19, such as the coordination of school districts and local health departments, as well as the procurement of materials to mitigate the spread or impact of infectious diseases.
- Professional development for educators related to distance education as well as sanitation and infectious disease protocols.
- Activities to address the unique needs of low-income children or students, children with disabilities, English learners, racial and ethnic minorities, students experiencing homelessness, and foster care youth, including how outreach and service delivery will meet the needs of each population.
- Procurement of educational technology (including hardware, software, and connectivity) for students who are served by the local educational agency that aids in regular and substantive

educational interaction between students and their classroom instructors, including low-income students and students with disabilities, which may include assistive technology or adaptive equipment.

- Provision of mental health services and supports.
- Planning and implementing activities related to summer learning and supplemental afterschool programs, including providing classroom instruction or online learning during the summer months and addressing the needs of low-income students, students with disabilities, English learners, migrant students, students experiencing homelessness, and children in foster care.
- Activities that are necessary to maintain the operation of and continuity of services in local educational agencies and continuing to employ existing staff of the local educational agency.

As previously stated, school districts and charter schools have tremendous flexibility regarding the expenditures of ESSER funds. As always, the NDE is prepared to provide support, guidance, and technical assistance to school districts and charter schools. The NDE also believes that in order for school districts and charter schools to maximize the positive impact of ESSER funds, they must assess their needs using a systematic approach that involves the consultation of stakeholders.

Emergency Directive Impact

- On March 15, 2020, Governor Sisolak announced that school buildings would be closed to students beginning March 16 and at least through April 6, 2020.
- On March 20, 2020, Governor Sisolak issued Emergency Directive 005, which:
 - Extended the school building closures through April 16, 2020;
 - Reiterated the essential nature of district and charter school administrators, licensed educators, and staff in providing vital services and distance education to Nevada's students;
 - Suspended State assessment requirements; and
 - Directed the State Superintendent of Public Instruction to put in place a process for districts and charter schools to request approval for an Emergency Program of Distance Education and, upon such approval, automatically enrolled students in an emergency program of distance education. Directive 005 also expanded the definition of distance education to include paper correspondence, so schools could provide educational opportunities to students regardless of access to technology, means, or at-home support.
- On April 14, 2020, Governor Sisolak issued Emergency Directive 014, which:
 - Extended the school building closures through April 30, 2020;
 - Supported the authority of the State Superintendent of Public Instruction to temporarily waive or suspend laws or regulations that would place an undue burden on students' ability to graduate from high school on-time;
 - Allowed the State Board of Education to approve amendments to districts' work-based learning plans. These amendments, to be considered at the State Board's April 30 meeting, will ensure students are able to earn the credit hours needed for a College and Career Ready Diploma despite the impact of COVID-19-related workplace closures; and

- Directed Regional Professional Development Programs to work directly through the Superintendent of Public Instruction and the Department of Education to provide guidance and resources to teachers and other licensed personnel throughout the declaration of emergency.

NDE Guidance to Districts and Schools

- [Nevada Educator Performance Framework Guidance \(March 24, 2020\)](#) &
- [Assessment and Accountability Guidance \(March 27, 2020\)](#) &
- [Class of 2020 Graduation Guidance \(April 2, 2020\)](#) &
- [COVID-19 Guidance for Federal Titles Programs under ESSA and McKinney-Vento \(April 3, 2020\)](#) &
- [NV Provisional EL Identification Procedure \(EL refers to English Learners\) \(April 10, 2020\)](#) &
- [Civics Assessment Waiver for Class 2020 \(April 15, 2020\)](#) &
- [Ongoing Response to School Building Closures in Nevada \(April 22, 2020\)](#) &

Educator Licensure Operations

The Governor's school-building closure and other measures taken in response to the COVID-19 health crisis may affect the educator licensure process for both current and prospective educators. Impacts include the closure of some background check locations and all ETS Praxis testing sites, as well as challenges to completing professional development requirements. Background checks, professional development, and testing are typical requirements for both current educators and prospective educator candidates to receive or renew educator licenses.

The ongoing COVID-19 health crisis has not disrupted the ability of the Nevada Department of Education to receive and process applications and renewals for licensure. While our offices in Las Vegas and Carson City are currently closed to the public, the Office of Educator Development, Licensure and Family Engagement is currently processing applications as quickly as possible. Department staff is available to assist educators, schools, and districts with their licensure-related inquiries and needs by telephone and by email.

While some delays in application and background check processing may occur due to the COVID-19 precautions that are in place, the Department has taken certain steps to attempt to minimize the impact of these delays. These include:

- All applications for licensure or renewal submitted on or after Monday, March 16, 2020, and identified as requiring additional documentation in order to be processed, will remain active in our system for 75 days from the date of application in order to allow applicants additional time to obtain and submit the necessary documents. Most documents can be submitted through the Online Portal

for Application and Licensure (OPAL), and our office is still receiving U.S. Postal Service mail delivery daily. [OPAL may be accessed](#) 24 hours a day, 7 days a week from any computer.

- Applicants who have submitted an application on or after March 16, 2020, may upload scanned copies of their official college or university transcripts into OPAL in lieu of sending originals to our office. Any applicant who submits scanned transcripts will be issued a provisional license and will be required to provide original transcripts within 90 days after license issuance.
- All educator licenses expiring between March and June of 2020 have automatically been extended through June 30, 2020. If the current state of emergency results in longer than anticipated delays in resuming normal business practices, the Department will provide an additional extension. Licensees will not need to take any additional action or pay any additional fees to obtain this extension.
- ETS, the Department's Praxis testing vendor, is working to develop an at-home testing option for certain Praxis tests and will waive fees for test rescheduling if necessary. Additional information and updates are available on the [ETS Praxis testing website](#).
- Applicants who are required to fingerprint in order to obtain or renew a license and who submitted an application on or after Monday, March 16, 2020, will be given 75 days from the date of application to submit their fingerprints via Livescan or to mail a fingerprint card to the Department via U.S. mail. A number of Livescan vendors and law enforcement agencies have temporarily stopped providing fingerprinting services for civil applicants, and several vendors have modified their hours of operation. A [list of fingerprinting vendors](#) known to still be open is available on our website. Since this list is subject to change without notice, we recommend that you call vendors and confirm whether they are open.
- There are a number of online professional development opportunities still available to educators, and [a list of Department approved vendors](#) is available online. For information on license renewal requirements, see the [Educator Licensure website](#).

Department staff are making every effort to maintain open communication with educators and applicants via email and telephone and remain dedicated to serving Nevada's educators during these difficult times.

For Your Situational Awareness

The items in this section are informational to provide context to the Governor's Office on our ongoing work.

Department vs. District Role

One of the key conversation points that has recurred throughout the COVID-19 response is the distinction between what is under the Nevada Department of Education's purview and what is left to local (district/charter school) control. Here are a few important points to note:

Distance Education

- Directive 005 also instructed the State Superintendent to put in place a process for districts and charter schools to request approval for an emergency program of distance education and, upon such approval, automatically enrolled students in an emergency program of distance education

- In light of the circumstances facing our schools and communities, the need to take swift action to minimize the loss of instructional time for Nevada’s children, and our shared responsibility to promote social distancing and limit public meetings, NDE worked with the Attorney General’s Office to develop a Request for an Emergency Program of Distance Education that included certain conditions and assurances.
- Districts did NOT submit distance education plans to NDE; just requests for approval with affirmations that they would meet certain minimum requirements. Distance education plans and implementation are under the purview of districts.

Licensed Educational Personnel and District/School Employees

- Directive 005 reiterated the essential nature of district and charter school administrators, licensed educators, and staff in providing vital services and distance education to Nevada’s students. It also indicated that, throughout the school building and district office closures, district/school employees would work under the direction of local superintendents and school leaders and:
 - Shall be paid in accordance with local collective bargaining agreements;
 - May be reassigned as necessary to support students, including support with distance learning and the instructional needs of children, food distribution, and other emerging needs; and
 - May perform duties while away from school buildings and district office sites.
 - NDE has not issued guidance nor does it have any authority over collective bargaining agreements, staff assignments, etc.

Graduation

- NDE issued graduation guidance to districts on [April 2, 2020](#) that was developed in consultation with district superintendents. Directive 014 supported the authority of the State Superintendent to waive requirements that would place an undue burden on seniors graduating in the Class of 2020, which supported the [civics assessment waiver](#) we put in place.
- Any decisions regarding how, when, and whether graduation ceremonies will take place are at the discretion of districts and schools.

Curriculum and grades

- NDE is responsible for developing academic content standards that indicate what students at each grade level should know and be able to do in each content area. Content standards support the development of local curricula and lesson plans.
- Nevada has a long-standing tradition of local control and, as such, district and school leaders make decisions regarding the specific content of distance education, curriculum, grades, etc. This is the case during the COVID-19-related school building closures, as well as under ordinary circumstances.
- As noted above, local control also applies to decisions regarding how best to handle graduation and other end-of-year milestones within the rules established by the Governor’s Emergency Directives and the guidance from local public health officials.

District Leadership Changes

It is important to note that, prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, a number of school district leaders had announced retirements for the end of this school year, including:

- Teri White, Douglas County School District (also State Board of Education appointee from Nevada Association of School Superintendents)
- Todd Pehrson, Elko County School District
- Dale Norton, Nye County School District

To date, we have not heard from any of those leaders that their intentions have changed, nor have announcements been made regarding interim leadership.

Looking Forward: Ongoing COVID-19 Response

Re-Opening of Schools Committee

The primary role of the Re-Opening of Schools Committee (Committee) is to assist districts and charter schools in developing and implementing a framework for a safe, efficient, and equitable return to school. This framework will be needed to assist districts and charter schools with prevention, response, and recovery strategies to meet the changing conditions created by the COVID-19 pandemic. Because of the many variables that may shift over the coming weeks and months, schools will need a framework with multiple approaches and strategies that can be initiated independently or simultaneously, depending on need.

The Committee, consisting of state health officials, district superintendents, charter school leaders, and other experts, will work to produce an actionable framework based on the latest guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and State health officials. The framework will address the physical, mental, social, and emotional considerations to reopen and manage districts and schools during this ongoing crisis.

The framework will be created with the following principles:

- Health and safety of students, educators, and staff is paramount
- Informed by evidence-based public health and education emergency operations planning best practices
- Informed by direct feedback of epidemiologists, psychologists, district superintendents, public charter school leaders, school administrators, educators, parents, and students
- Designed to assist and support districts and charter schools in identifying locally developed, prioritized essential actions needed for each individual district and charter school
- Acknowledgement of the limited time as well as human and financial resources available

This framework will:

- Be able to be embedded into current district and charter school emergency plans and contribute to the ongoing continuum of decision making
- Provide guidance and guardrails for consideration by districts and charter schools

- Help strengthen future crisis response
- Be a companion to traditional school opening procedures

The framework will not:

- Address academics
- Be an exhaustive list of every action a district or charter school should implement
- Create mandates for districts and charter schools
- Be a distance learning playbook or school closure guide
- Be applicable only for COVID-19 response and recovery
- Be a stand-alone resource, or legal or medical advice

Timeline

The Committee will begin meeting in May 2020. Meetings will be scheduled depending on progress and availability of information from the Centers for Disease Control and State health officials. Implementation feedback and support stakeholder meetings will be scheduled in July, August, and September and on an as needed basis after September to 1) collectively address and problem solve implementation issues, 2) adjust the framework to changing community conditions and/or 3) update evidence-based practices based on information from the Centers for Disease Control and State health officials.

Re-Opening of Schools Committee Members

Name	Role	Contact information
Melissa Peek-Bullock	State Epidemiologist	mpeekbullock@health.nv.gov
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Jeff Wagner	Interim Chief of Facilities, Clark County School District	wagneja@nv.ccsd.net
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Nevada’s Distance Learning Collaborative

When Nevada’s school buildings were closed due to the COVID-19 crisis, the Nevada Department of Education took an inventory of the challenges and inequities that were magnified within school districts and charter schools. The challenges that were magnified included, access to technological capacity, access to high-quality professional development, and access to high-quality instructional materials. This led the NDE to create the Nevada Distance Learning Collaborative. This collaborative represents NDE staff from various offices across the agency, an expert consultant in distance education, and multiple external stakeholders. The primary objective of this collaborative is to build an infrastructure that supports distance education across the state of Nevada. This infrastructure is inclusive of support to increase access to technological capacity, high-quality professional development, and high-quality instructional materials.

To build an initial understanding of the needs of LEAs, the NDE conducted a preliminary survey of needs for immediate technology and connectivity needs. The LEAs were inclusive of traditional public schools and charter schools. Based upon the preliminary survey, conversations and feedback from district leaders, we have a baseline understanding of what our LEAs, families and students need at this time. There were three essential themes that emerged from the preliminary survey:

1. There are approximately 136,507 devices needed for all student’s in Nevada (Prek-12) to have a device for remote learning. There are approximately 7,146 devices needed for all educators in Nevada (Prek-12) to have a device for remote learning.

2. Professional development for our educators is essential in order to promote high-quality instruction through remote learning. This theme is evidenced by 65% of the survey respondents.
3. A statewide learning management system (LMS) is needed to enable the NDE to support LEAs with access to high-quality content for instruction through remote learning.

In accordance with the CARES Act guidance, NDE will continue to prioritize supports to our highest-need districts and work collaboratively with them to ensure that funding goes towards supporting all students in traditional public schools and charter schools, as well as private schools and early childhood centers where applicable.

Access to Technological Capacity

The NDE continues to work collaboratively with other state agencies, such as the Governor's Office of Science, Innovation, and Technology (OSIT), to increase connectivity to combat the digital divide for both rural areas, where there is no or limited connectivity for students, and urban areas where access is limited due to financial situations, device access, etc. This ensures that our highest-need students (low-income children or students, children with disabilities, English learners, racial and ethnic minorities, students experiencing homelessness, foster care youths and neglected and delinquent youth in detention centers and prisons) in traditional public, charter and private schools and families can access reliable connectivity. This includes:

- Mobile hotspots, individual and community (libraries, schools, buses, etc.)
- Devices with built-in hotspots
- Increased family data plans to support families that will need additional bandwidth for multiple student learners

Each of the aforementioned ideas represent findings that were constructed from the preliminary survey conducted by NDE, as reported by LEAs. Based on these results, NDE will need to support efforts to ensure ALL students have the ability to participate fully in remote learning opportunities.

Support efforts may include using available funds to assist LEAs in obtaining the needed equipment. In addition, NDE will coordinate with other state agencies, multi-state consortiums, and local and national non-profits and businesses to leverage agreements with cellular and WiFi service providers to expand and support connectivity across the state (in areas not currently served). As part of the NDE's goal to support LEAs through a collaborative lens with other entities, the following strategies were developed:

- Work collaboratively with OSIT, Nevada's Department of Human and Health Services (DHHS) and the Department of Employment, Training and Rehabilitation (DETR) to accomplish the common goal of supporting rural areas that need connectivity.
- Analyze the short- and long-term plans of current providers (Spectrum, AT&T, etc.) in opening up their hotspots, knowing that there are some districts that do not have any hotspots in their areas, including Lincoln County School District and White Pine School District.

- Research the work that is planned with E-Rate federal grants to continue broadband development and expansion in our rural schools.
- Research how Nevada could work with other states to establish partnerships with national cellular and WiFi service providers to expand and support connectivity across the state with sufficient bandwidth to support multiple users.

As the NDE's work moves forward, it will be important to assess these strategies in order to measure the impact of the support efforts on increasing access to distance learning.

Access to High-Quality Professional Development

To ensure that all students have access to high quality educational opportunities, the Nevada Department of Education (NDE) will partner with the Regional Professional Development Programs (RPDP) effective educators, education and community organizations, and other states to develop and deliver high-quality content and to build educator capacity in providing effective remote learning experiences.

State and Federal funding will be prioritized to address the urgent needs, as well as the short- and long-term impacts of COVID-19 on Nevada's education system. Specifically, that means prioritizing targeted professional development to those educators with the greatest need: by content; by grade levels; and for targeted student populations that include, PreK, low-income students, English Learners, students with disabilities, homeless youth, and foster youth. NDE will build on existing partnerships with the Regional Professional Development Programs (RPDP), Nevada's System of Higher Education (NSHE), and other local and national community and education organizations (e.g., CCSSO, Results for America, WestEd, Public Education Foundation, Guinn Center) to maximize the collaborative efforts to provide effective and evidence-based professional development for teachers and educators, as well as professional development for parents and to families.

NDE will also expand on its partnerships with state and national experts. The State will invest funding in credible and reputable research and evaluation partners to conduct a rigorous evaluation to ensure the following: 1) that professional development is evidence-based and meets the federal and national standards for effectiveness; and 2) that data is collected and leveraged to inform continuous improvement. This will be in collaboration with multiple offices within the NDE.

Access to High-Quality Instructional Materials

To ensure that students and educators have access to high-quality instruction, the NDE has established the Nevada Department of Education Digital Engineers cohort. This cohort of digital engineers, which will serve as an extension of the Nevada Distance Learning Collaborative, will be composed of selected educators who will assist in developing and/or selecting standards-aligned, high-quality instructional materials to assist teachers in providing distance learning opportunities for all students.

It is important to note that this model currently exists within Nevada. The Nevada Learning Academy in the Clark County School District has been providing distance-learning AP, CTE, and credit recovery courses across Nevada. NDE can collaborate and coordinate with district leaders to expand this model on the State platform to include other high-needs courses. This directly aligns to the State's Strategic Plan Goal #2, Equity

Output. This model has also been helping to combat Nevada’s teacher shortage, especially in hard-to-fill and specialty courses such as Advanced Placement (AP); Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM); Career Technical Education (CTE); and International Baccalaureate (IB.) This is an opportunity to allow districts and schools to host courses for multiple schools and districts. For example, while Health Science and Public Safety CTE courses are offered at three high schools in Clark County and one in Washoe County, Douglas County and Elko County also have demand.

Additionally, the NDE will continue to partner with other states and organizations that focus on building the State and LEAs’ capacity to implement state strategies to increase the use of high-quality instructional materials content (e.g., Johns Hopkins University and WestEd).

The NDE continues to prioritize and promote the investment of funding in credible and reputable research and evaluation partners to conduct a rigorous evaluation that vets the instructional materials to ensure they are high-quality and evidence-based. With regard to the pathway forward from COVID-19, this will be in collaboration with the NDE Office of Standards and Instructional Support and Office of Students and School Supports, to ensure that the instructional materials shared across the State are standards aligned, high-quality, and effective in terms of improving school outcomes. Funding rigorous evaluation tied to these efforts are a critical and key component of the continuous improvement process. Nevada students, especially our most vulnerable, during this time need and deserve an education system that delivers strong and positive teaching and learning outcomes. An integral part of this is having high-quality content that is accessible to all students and families.

2020 Statewide Plan for the Improvement of Pupils

In accordance with the requirements of NRS 385.11, the NDE will present its final *2020 Statewide Plan for the Improvement of Pupils (STIP)* to the State Board of Education at their meeting on April 30, 2020. The *2020 STIP* is informed by the conversations with district and school leaders, school board members, students, families, and stakeholders during the Superintendent’s Statewide Listening Tour, as well as by data regarding student achievement, educator licensure and outcomes, school ratings, and evidence-based best practices. Through the *2020 STIP*, NDE has established six goals for the State education system to achieve by 2025:

Goal 1: All children, birth through third grade, have access to quality early care and education.

Goal 2: All students have access to effective educators.

Goal 3: All students experience continued academic growth.

Goal 4: All students graduate future-ready and globally prepared for postsecondary success and civic life.

Goal 5: All students have access to new and continued educational opportunities supported by funding that is administered transparently, consistently, and in accordance with legislative or grant guidelines.

Goal 6: All students and adults learn and work together in safe schools where identities and relationships are valued and celebrated.

The *STIP* will guide our work to support schools throughout the 2020-2021 school year and beyond, especially in the absence of assessment and accountability results that were suspended due to the 2019-2020 school building closures.