



Texas Association of Community Schools

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TACS Zoom Meeting Summary

Meeting with TACS and Sara Leon & Associates

Friday, April 24, 2020

11:00 AM

Commissioner's Call 4/23/20 Recap

There have been 561 COVID fatalities as of yesterday, with 21,944 people testing positive out of 225,078 tested.

TEA has reorganized their COVID page and cleaned it up to help make things easier to find. Different topics are now separated into what the commissioner called "cards."

They also have a section titled "Most Popular Guidance and Resources" for quick access to those documents.

A new working group has been formed to work quickly on graduation policies and get answers to help districts ASAP. TASA held a virtual meeting this week on graduation and they've posted graduation ideas from different districts on their site. If you are a TASA member, check your TASA daily on Friday for a link.

The Special Education page has 4 areas: General Guidance, Instructional Support, Parent Resources, and Instructional Continuity Framework. [IEPs and ARD Committees FAQ](#) has also been added.

The Commissioner is NOT recommending ending your school year earlier than your adopted calendar dictates; he said that if anything, kids need MORE instruction right now.

TEA COVID Website Updates

Special Ed FAQ Updates

Several new questions have been added.

Question #5 asks how you should document services if you can't provide FIIE (Full Individual Initial Evaluation). As campus teams convene, make recommendations for what can be done in the interim for those students who are still in the referral process, but not eligible to receive services yet. Document if you aren't meeting your timelines and why you are unable to during our school closures.

Question #6 deals with HB 3 dyslexia funds and clarifies that yes, up to 20% of an LEA's HB 3 dyslexia funds can be spent to contract with a private provider to provide supplemental academic services.

Question #7 makes recommendations for how to handle students with disabilities that you haven't been able to contact. TEA suggested using multiple ways to connect with these families. Possibly make a home visit with proper social distancing protocols. Find out what is keeping these students from being able to participate in virtual or paper learning and plan for how you will overcome those barriers. Go the extra mile and don't just keep emailing the students and hoping for a response.

If there are students who are unable to do distance learning due to their disability, or something more external like their internet access, look at the barriers causing problems and try to rectify the issue. It is still the district's responsibility to provide FAPE (Question #8).

Question #9 addresses the privacy concerns some providers have in using Zoom for ARD meetings. TEA says every LEA should make the decision on what meeting tool to use based on their level of comfort with the security within the tool and watch the [cybersecurity webinar](#) for extra guidance.

Question #11 answers if high cost funds (HCF) will be based on what would have been expended or only what has been incurred. HCF is determined by costs of educating a student that exceeds three times the average per pupil expenditure (APPE). HCF cover only costs identified in the child's Individualized Education Program (IEP) and associated with providing direct special education and related services. It is a reimbursement of costs, so if monies paid by the state to an LEA are not expended as planned in accordance with the IEP they should be returned to TEA. The due date is now 5/15/2020.

Question #7 in the General Questions section of the guidance is on certification requirements, but it doesn't answer anything dealing with educators who are on a probationary type of certificate. Crystal spoke with Tam Jones yesterday and he said they still don't have any additional guidance. If teachers were working on getting an additional certifications, it's a district issue on whether you're going to extend their contract. However, Pearson will hopefully be opening for testing soon to enable those folks to get certified.

[Guidance on accessibility and assistive devices](#) has been added. Make the assistive devices students would need in class available for them at home. This could mean anything from a pencil grip to internet help. Communicate your instructional plan to parents and students, and monitor and adjust it as needed.

The guidance on ECI for students who are deaf/hard of hearing and/or blind/visually impaired clarifies that no, LEAs do not have to provide ECI if the lead agency or ECI program is closed. If the offices are open but Part C services cannot be provided in a particular location (such as in the child's home), by a particular EIS provider, or to a particular child who is infected with COVID-19, then the lead agency must ensure the continuity of services by, for example, providing services in an alternate location, by using a different EIS provider, or through alternate means, such as consultative services to the parent.

[A Notice for Monitoring, Review, and Support for SPED](#) has been published. If you were scheduled for a visit or monitoring, the dates have been changed. If you were set for an April – June date, that will shift to August for the fall cycle. If you were already visited, the agency has until June 1 to return a report to you. If you did a targeted desk review and you didn't submit student records prior to March 16, they will move you to fall 2020. If you were scheduled for a targeted on-site review, those are cancelled for spring and fall and will not be rescheduled. SPED Self assessments are postponed until January 2021.

[COVID 19 Support: Closure Guidance and Communication](#)

This week, the Commissioner talked about the guidance on entering schools during closure. Staff CAN be back in the building under certain parameters. Teachers can enter their classrooms for administrative or instructional purposes, or to clean out their room for the year. Commissioner Morath recommends that teachers and staff be staggered in their visits, with effective social distancing applied. Staff members should be in their classroom or office alone; when they move about the campus, they should be distanced 6 feet from each other. Staff must wear a mask or face covering and must screen themselves at home before coming in. This means they shouldn't have a new or persistent cough, shortness of breath, sore throat, loss of taste/smell, feel feverish, have a temperature of 100 degrees or more, or know they've had close contact with someone who tested positive for COVID-19.

There is a new link called "[Attorney General Informal Guidance.](#)" Commissioner Morath had asked what the protocol is if the governor gives an order, but counties have stricter guidelines in place – which one trumps the other? It's the attorney general's opinion that a governor's executive order supersedes local ordinance.

If your school campus is closed but you have activities planned (such as those for prom or graduation), his advice is to consult your attorney to make sure you are following all the governor's guidelines. If your school attorney thinks that you have a plan in place that meets all governor's expectations for distant and safety, you may proceed. However, make sure to also contact your local officials and get written approval allowing the event.

[Academics](#)

There is [new guidance on CCMR and dual credit](#) - share this info with counselors and teachers teaching dual credit courses. The main takeaway is to make decisions about how students are receiving coursework and to develop something collaboratively with them so that when it's time to issue credit, everyone is on the same page.

The new [Early Childhood Ed Guidance](#) confirms that pre-registration is on or after April 1 for pre-K. The end of year test for pre-k students is not required or expected. There are no kindergarten through second grade end of year requirements. You will have beginning of year testing requirements for them, though. We are still waiting for guidance on end of year dyslexia screening for kindergarten students.

The high quality pre-k program evaluation at the end of the year is not expected or required, but is encouraged.

Pre-k teachers who were supposed to have additional qualification had 7 options for meeting this requirement. The only one impacted by COVID is Option #7, requiring that the prekindergarten teacher be appropriately certified to teach prekindergarten and complete 30 hours of ECE-specific professional development annually with 15 of the 30 hours being in a mentoring/coaching relationship until 150 hours are documented.

[Graduation FAQ](#)

Guidelines for in-person graduation ceremonies will be made available as soon as possible. There were some interesting ideas shared on the commissioner call. For example, one district is holding a twilight graduation out on their football stadium with students and families very spread out (like the Air Force did). Other districts have chosen alternate ceremony dates for June and July.

[Enrollment FAQ](#)

If a student is transferring from another Texas public school, the LEA will still submit a TReX request to the student's previous school or schools. The previous school should make all attempts possible to provide information in a timely manner and send all records electronically through TReX. TEA has shared some [best practices for enrolling/withdrawing students](#) share this info with your registrar if you have one.

[COVID Related Waivers](#)

They've now added a CPR waiver – this one does require LEA action.

Governor Abbott has also issued a waiver to allow certain educator candidates who have completed the educator certification requirements to qualify for a one-year probationary certificate without meeting testing requirements, paid internship requirements, and other pre-employment requirements. This waiver applies only to those candidates who meet the following criteria:

- Teacher candidates who completed clinical teaching during Fall 2019 and/or Spring 2020 and have not passed their required certification exams (will be eligible for a one-year probationary certificate when completed application and program recommendation are submitted by June 15)
- Non-teacher candidates without an existing certificate who completed a practicum during Fall 2019 and/or Spring 2020 who have not passed required certification exam (will be eligible for a one-year probationary certificate when completed application and program recommendation are submitted by June 15)
- Teacher candidates who completed an internship during Spring 2020 who have not passed required certification exam (if designated as having completed all reparation requirements by their educator preparation program, they will be eligible for probationary certificate by the June 15 deadline)
- Non-teacher candidates who completed an internship during Spring 2020 who have not passed required certification exam (if designated as having completed all reparation requirements by their educator preparation program, they will be eligible for probationary certificate by the June 15 deadline)

[District Reporting and Data](#)

TSDS and PEIMS

The [PEIMS FAQ](#) has been updated. As we reported last week, A PASS/FAIL-CREDIT-INDICATOR-CODE is reported for each course completion record submitted for a student. There is an option to report a course as incomplete using the “Course work is incomplete, and no credit has been awarded” Pass/Fail indicator. HOWEVER, an incomplete cannot be on the semester transcript; at some point, it has to be changed to Pass or Fail. If it doesn’t get changed, it will reflect a non-Pass and the student will have to re-take course.

If direct assessment is needed for a Non-Categorical Early Childhood (NCECC) re-evaluation and the testing cannot be completed because of COVID-19, a 6-year-old coded as NCEC will not be a fatal error on PEIMS. Nothing in the system prevents a campus from recording a 6-year-old as NCEC.

If you’ve been identifying students as G/T, you only report students in PEIMS if they have been participating in the state approved G/T program. Identification is not enough to report.

PEIMS Early Reading Indicator (E1522) indicates whether a student is reading at grade level or not as a result of reading difficulties or dyslexia. The Early Reader Indicator Code applies to students in kindergarten and first and second grade. The Texas Education Data Standards says to report grade level reading status based on the latest assessment results available for a student. If due to COVID-19 or any other reason a student was not assessed, use code 3: Student was not assessed (C195).

Other/Announcements

Barry also noticed something interesting about the Attorney General’s opinion on open meetings and public comment in regard to board meetings. The AG said that it is permissible for boards to have all public comments taken as the meeting begins. Specifically, the guidance says that governmental bodies may set aside public comment requirements by holding a single comment period to cover all items on the agenda at the start of the meeting, and can cap comment time as long as it’s reasonable. You do not have to take comments item by item, but rather can have them done all at once.

Due to the strong response we received from the last webinar held by Sara Leon and Associates, they will now be holding weekly trainings on Thursdays.

A training on the Families First Coronavirus Response Act for schools will be next Thursday, April 30 at 2:00 PM.

Registration URL: <https://us02web.zoom.us/meeting/register/tZwtfuusqj0tHtw51qTlIn9YitnEuvw-Efwb>

A training on special education considerations for returning students to school will be Thursday, May 7 at 2:00 PM.

Registration URL: https://us02web.zoom.us/meeting/register/tZ0kcuiogj8uGNZvh6XMf_R3YID8o79nYx-H

Outstanding Questions to TEA

The following are the questions we have asked TEA on behalf of our members, to which we haven’t received a response yet:

- Since certification tests are not happening right now, some districts are concerned that teachers who are currently employed will be unable to complete requirements for them to continue employment. With the 10 days before the end of instruction rules, will any of the certification requirements be waived - for example, will TEA give teachers another year to complete certification requirements?
- Is TEA working on any type of checklist for re-entry for students and/or teachers?
- ~~For the PEIMS information addressed in question 1 of the FAQ for Finance, could you give some examples for the following scenarios: 9-week reporting, and situations where the 5th six weeks started prior to spring break.~~
- ~~Will the waiver for CPR for seniors be placed on the waiver page? **Waivers will be up soon!**~~
- In looking at vetting the instructional resources (as addressed in the latest information on Information Technology as of 4/9/2020), we wondered if the resources on TEA’s pages have been vetted?

If you have heard from TEA on any of these issues and have a response in writing, please forward it to Barry or Crystal so we may share the resource with our other members.

We invite you to continue to visit [our website for updates and information](#),

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Disclaimer: This information is accurate as of April 24, 2020. It is intended for informational and educational purposes only, and is not a substitute for legal advice.