



Texas Association of Community Schools

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TACS Zoom Meeting Summary

Meeting with TACS and Sara Leon & Associates

Wednesday, July 15, 2020

11:00 AM

Commissioner's Call 7/14/2020

Commissioner Morath started the call addressing that many teachers and parents are worried because we have high levels of community spread in Texas. The survey data tells us that many parents want remote instruction, but also many other families want on-campus instruction, which is what presents a challenge for the Texas Education Agency and for our districts as a whole.

Funding for remote instruction is provided under a variety of circumstances (more information on that below), including if you have to close campus due to confirmed COVID case. Check out the public health guidance linked below for more information. You can close and go fully remote for up to 5 days, but you don't HAVE to stay closed for the 5 days. There was some miscommunication about that earlier and the Commissioner apologized for any confusion.

There is a new [Public Health Orders card](#). In the light blue box, you will see the [SY 20-21 Public Health Guidance](#). Also newly added are the [TEA Informal Selection Process for COVID-19 Symptom Screening](#) and a vendor proposal form. TEA plans to publish a list of mobile and web-based software applications to be used by districts to screen staff, students, and visitors for COVID symptoms. TEA will NOT award vendors a contract. Districts must contact vendors directly from the TEA list. LEAS are NOT obligated to use vendors from the list and may use other vendors or no vendors.

The Commissioner also reviewed the Pandemic EBT (P-EBT) program. You can find this information in the Child Nutrition card. The program deadline has been extended until July 31. They've had 1.4 million applications approved in Texas and provided \$800 million to needy students; they have \$200 million left in funding, so encourage families to apply. He encourages another round of outreach by social media, robo calls, and letter to parents. Examples of each are provided on the website.

Waivers, Finance, and Grants card updates

They've updated the [SY 20-21 Attendance and Enrollment FAQ](#) and added a chart with the materials for [remote instruction requirements](#).

What to know about the Asynchronous Letter of Intent:

1. LEAS should submit this online application before the first day of asynchronous instruction.
2. The application should take 5 minutes or less to complete.
3. One submission is required per LEA utilizing asynchronous instruction.
4. Submitting the letter of Intent results in contingent approval for funding through the end of the grace period.
5. The Letter of Intent does not require board approval
6. October 1 is the deadline to submit the district's Asynchronous Plan (examples will be provided by TEA soon).

The Commissioner's suggestion for making this work is to lean on your service centers and consider "teaming up" with other nearby districts to address insufficient staffing issues. We received a lot of concern from our members on the feasibility of this and some comments wondering if this is a roundabout way of forcing consolidation.

LEAs can blend synchronous and asynchronous learning and you can be fully remote for the first 3 weeks. For kids without internet, you can do offline asynchronous instruction (which we understand to be packets). Students need to be provided a small, on-campus option if they want to/need to come in, or you can provide them technology. Outside of grades pre-K-4 there are no class size limits. The ratio is 22:1 for other grades, but boards can vote to lift that and submit documentation to TEA. Pre-K will be funded for new students.

Some districts are going all virtual. Some districts will transition in students slowly to on-campus. We heard from a couple whose boards have said we are all in on-campus beginning day one. Obviously, our rural districts whose regions experience infrastructure gaps will continue to have connectivity issues. Morath acknowledged that learning remotely for entire districts with limited connectivity will be hard to solve short-term and will be very expensive.

Operation Connectivity

They announced the launch of Operation Connectivity, a project designed to address the digital divide and make sure all students can have internet and proper technology at home. They went through the newly added [playbook](#) during the call. They sent out a survey last night to get counts for bulk purchase of devices: what you need and/or what orders you've already placed (because you may be reimbursed for them). There may be more negotiating power if ordering in bulk, so having your tech ordered through the state may be beneficial since there are some roadblocks with supplies being readily available.

They have posted a registration questionnaire template on devices that contains 4 basic questions to consider as you survey your families:

1. Viable internet solution
2. Speed of internet
3. Which students have (or share) devices at home
4. The number of devices in the home (this may matter if you have 4 kids but only one computer)

The TEA website also linked a family survey in English and Spanish. Just a few of the topics covered include:

1. How many students in the home/which grades?
2. Do they have internet?
3. Why do they not have internet access or a device (is it cost or is it another barrier like not knowing how to use it)
4. Have they had internet before?
5. Does the school district pay or subsidize your at-home internet connectivity?
6. Where does the family typically connect to the internet?

There are 21 questions total.

Many of these things have been asked of our students and families in the spring and in some cases were readdressed already this summer. Adding the questionnaire to your registration documents for new students would be a good way to gather the information consistently.

CARES Act Funding

We've gotten many questions on CARES Act Funding. You'll want to refer back to the June 18th document on CARES Act funding in the Waivers, Finance, and Grants card titled [CARES Act funding for LEAs](#). There are several different sources of CARES Act funding. The one that most people are probably referencing is ESSER funding.

ESSER funding went to Title I schools for the dates between May 15, 2020 - June 30, 2021. You can spend those funds prior to these dates beginning with the day most of the closures began, March 13th.

Title VIII of Division B was a childcare development block grant. There was also Title VIII of Division B School Emergency Response to Violence (SERV).

Then you also have the Section 5001 Corona Relief Fund - only from March 31 to May 20, 2020. That's the funding you spent this spring. You can see more information on CRF in the above linked document.

Recess/Playground Rules

TEA gives the following guidelines for younger students/play spaces. For older children, you can encourage them to stay 6 feet apart. It may help to restrict groups to specific play areas using tape, cones, or a natural barrier to prevent them from interacting too closely. Schools may also send only one class group to a place space at a time.

For younger students and those with disabilities who may struggle to understand socially distanced play spaces, it is recommended that only one class group uses a play space at a time. Students in age groups who not need to use play equipment for recreation should not spend their recreation time in play spaces, if possible, and should maintain social distance outside, just as they do inside.

UIL Questions

Many members have questions on UIL participation and remote learning. Per Barry and Aaron Hood of Robert Lee ISD (who also is the Chair of the Policy Committee at UIL), UIL will consider remote instruction (4 hours a day is full-time; they must also meet attendance requirements) as being enrolled in your district. If transferring for athletic reasons, your district committee likely rules on that the same way if it was face-to-face instruction. Transfer students being ineligible for one year is the same policy for now. They've also said that whether or not you allow remote students to participate in UIL is a local decision.

Sara Leon from SLA added that if you are excluding remote learners from extracurriculars, please take into consideration those students with disabilities who may require an individualized accommodation.

Sonny Cruse said that he's heard some coaches are thinking of moving to varsity only schedules, which would limit the amount of kids on buses for several sports.

If you're wondering what other districts are thinking in regards to remote instruction and extracurriculars, see this shared Google doc and submit your own thoughts as well!

https://docs.google.com/document/d/1werafctaBQRcMr-aJSInqtFajbr_jCiBw-JB33V7K0E/edit

Remote Learning/Safety Concerns

Many local districts around us here in Austin are wanting fully remote instruction until at least after Labor Day due to hospitalization rate one of the requirements for Stage 2 Openings for the State of Texas. In a letter to the governor, they said epidemiologists estimate that in returning to in-person instruction, we may be looking at 40-1370 student deaths in just the Austin area if they return to in-person schooling in August.

More than ever, we need to work closely with our local health authorities to make decisions for our districts and ask for more flexibility. Hans Graff from Sara Leon and Associates shared [this article](#) saying that Gov. Abbott may extend the time allowed for remote.

Some of our members shared their plans:

- Tommy Hooker of Thrall ISD said: “We still plan to start August 10th but will do A/B Days with 1/2 each day for the first 3-weeks. This cuts enrollment into 1/2 (8-12 students per class), buys us time for working through protocols, relaxing staff member's minds, and buys time to see if COVID-19 starts to decrease. Minimizes virtual. We will count each day as minutes because students will take a packet home for days they do not report, as attendance is not required for the first 3-weeks. We will keep all families together. Yes, it will be ‘hold harmless’ but I can't allow more than 1/2 of our students back per day due to all aspects; including our electives!”
- Jill Siler of Gunter ISD: “We are going to run a rotating schedule for the first week. We are going to run modified schedules the next two weeks.”
- Sonny Cruse of Graham ISD: “We have been discussing the possibility of pushing to a later start day: after Labor Day.”
- Cristal Joslin of Jasper ISD: “We are starting face-to-face on August 12th" unless ordered to close.

Other Announcements/Trainings

The all ESC “Exploring and Expanding” virtual teaching training is TOMORROW so registration ends today! Register [here](#).

Sara Leon and Associates will be holding more trainings as well; a training on FFCR on July 23 (more info to come) and a 3-hour training on sexual harassment complaints under the new Title IX regulations on July 29 (register [here](#)).

TASBO will be holding a PEIMS academy on September 17-18; it will likely have both a virtual and in-person component.

Lastly, if your school is in need of sanitization services, please check out our partners at [GermBlast](#) and [Germinator Mobile Sanitizing](#) for help!

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Disclaimer: This information is accurate as of July 15, 2020. It is intended for informational and educational purposes only, and is not a substitute for legal advice.