



Texas Association of Community Schools

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TACS Zoom Meeting Summary

Meeting with TACS and Sara Leon & Associates

Wednesday, July 29, 2020

11:00 AM

We will now be moving to 9:00 AM on Mondays for these meetings starting next week! We plan to continue meeting at 11:00 AM on Wednesdays for as long as they're needed.

Commissioner's Call 7/23

There is a summary brief he encourages you to share with your staff and board. One of the biggest updates was the opinion shared by the Attorney General (covered in question 42 below). See his full letter [here](#). Typically, AG opinions are considered just that; an opinion. However, Morath did say that the AG's opinion is requiring the agency to make a change in how they fund districts. Continue to work closely with your local health authorities and if you have questions, contact your school district's attorney.

Commissioner Morath discussed his [Waiver of the Student Success Initiative \(SSI\) Promotion Requirements](#).

Changes to Waivers, Finance, and Grants Card

There have been updates to the [SY 20-21 Attendance and Enrollment FAQ](#).

New questions under "Attendance:"

Question 31: Are CTE courses still required to meet an average of 45 minutes per day in order to receive a V code needed to generate CTE weighted funding? Can minutes from multiple models be combined in order to meet the 45 minutes per day minimum requirement? (Example: course taught for 20 minutes per day synchronously and 20 minutes asynchronously)

Yes, an average of 45 minutes per day or 450 minutes over a two-week period is still required in order for a CTE course to receive a V1 code needed for CTE funding. Minutes from multiple instructional models may be combined to secure funding.

Question 34: Will students who were enrolled in private school, including a home school, the prior year in Texas be eligible for funding through the remote synchronous or asynchronous instructional methods?

TEA edited this to add: "If prior to enrollment in the LEA the parents of such students sign an agreement that communicates that their students will attend on-campus at some point during the school year, that signed agreement will ensure that LEAs will be entitled to the funding the student generates throughout the school year, even if the student ultimately never participates in on-campus instruction.

Question 35: Can my LEA charge tuition for students who previously attended a private school, including homeschool, in Texas the prior year to participate in remote instruction?

No, BUT see above question for the exception; no, unless they sign something saying they will put them on campus at some time during the year, even if the student never participates in on-campus instruction.

Question 42: My LEA was subject to a blanket closure order issued by my local health authority. Will solely remote instruction be funded for the time period of the order?

No. The Texas Attorney General issued a guidance letter on July 28, 2020, that stated that "... local health authorities may not issue blanket orders closing all schools in their jurisdiction on a purely prophylactic basis." However, the start of year transition period would be an exception if non-campus instruction is offered.

Question 45: If you can accommodate all students with connectivity and devices but parents want to send their students to school, do you have to have in-person setting during the transition period?

No, not during the first 4-week period.

Question 48: Can high school students who are served fully on-campus or through a hybrid on-campus plan receive full-day funding if they attend school for 240 minutes each day?

The two requirements to generate full-day ADA funding are: 1) students are provided at least 240 minutes of instruction per day AND 2) campuses are open for operation for 75,600 minutes annually. So, unless the campus plans to provide 315 days of instruction, NO.

Question 49: What are the requirements for taking attendance when students are on campus, but instruction is being provided by a teacher who is not in the classroom with the students?

On-campus attendance must be taken by a school official who is physically in the classroom with the students at the official attendance time and who is eligible via the *Student Attendance Accounting Handbook* to take attendance.

New questions under "Calendars and Waivers:"

Question 6: If I want to have a block of time each day where teachers are on campus but not providing on-campus instruction, can I include that time in my 75,600 operational minute calculation? For example, if I want to hold on-campus classes from 8:00AM-2:00PM and send students home so that teachers can receive staff development and/or provide asynchronous instruction from 2:00PM-4:00PM, can the time from 2:00PM-4:00PM be included in the 75,600 operational minute calculation?

To count toward the 75,600 minutes, the campus would need to be open and available to all students who wish to remain for instruction and it must be provided. Transportation will need to be provided for eligible riders as well.

Question 7: Would a schedule where my LEA provides on-campus instruction Monday-Thursday and is fully remote every Friday meet the 75,600-minute requirement?

No, unless 1) the school year is extended, 2) the school day is extended, or 3) a high school campus is providing a hybrid schedule

Changes to [CARES Act Funding and COVID Expense Reimbursement FAQ](#)

New questions under "General Guidance:"

Question 3: Will CARES Act Funds be allowed to replace lost revenues in the Child Nutrition Budget to offset the wages LEAs continued to pay employees while not working during school closures? Also, for wages incurred to provide meals to our community under the Summer Feeding Program.

These activities could be paid under the ESSER grant.

New questions under "State Aid Implications - ESSER Grants"

Question 13: My LEA has a June 30th fiscal year end, how will I include March 1 through June 30, 2020, costs even though I may not receive all the funds until late in the Fall?

The ESSER grant can be used to pay for costs beginning March 13, 2020, and through June 30, 2022. Once the complete application is received the LEA will receive a preliminary NOGA and access to 20% of its grant funding. After the LEA is

issued a full NOGA it may access the remaining funds. Once the LEA requests payment from TEA, then the LEA can record the payment as a receivable. The LEA should be tracking the expenditures related to COVID-19 using a local code.

New info under "CARES Act – Coronavirus Relief Fund (CRF):"

TDEM should be releasing more information about these funds. Questions regarding the CRF LEA Reimbursement Program should be directed to CRF@tdem.texas.gov, however TEA will assist LEAs as much as possible with the TDEM process. Questions to TEA may be sent to GrantSupport@tea.texas.gov

Question 1: Besides the ESSER grant, does CARES Act provide any other assistance to reimburse LEAs for COVID-19 related expenditures?

The CARES Act includes \$6.2 billion in the Coronavirus Relief Fund from the U.S. Department of the Treasury. A portion of the state funding has been set aside to reimburse schools for COVID expenses incurred as of close of business on May 20, 2020.

Question 3: Is the CRF Reimbursement separate from the 75% FEMA public assistance? How does this go against FEMA's 75%?

Yes. Expenses that are allowable under the FEMA public Assistance for Category B expenses (basically cleaning and sanitizing costs) must be submitted to that process. Expenses covered under CRF may not be used to meet the LEA's 25% local share of FEMA.

Other Changes to Waivers, Finance, and Grants

New waivers have been added to the [2020-21 COVID-19 Related Waivers](#) document.

They've now added the [Texas Virtual School Network Guidance](#). New information to note:

Question 3: Will districts be able to request a waiver of the professional development requirement for teachers who will teach an electronic course offered through the TXVSN?

Yes. Districts may request a waiver of the professional development requirement in order to allow teachers who have not completed the requirement to teach online courses through the Texas Virtual School Network (TXVSN) in the 2020-2021 school year. Waiver instructions found on pages 2 and 3 of this document.

Pandemic EBT Program

The deadline for applying to this assistance program has been extended to August 21. There are still approximately 500 million Texas children eligible to receive help, so keep promoting this program to families in your district!

Public Health Card

During the call, they went through the newly added [Public Health Operational Guidebook](#). This presentation goes over how to develop a plan for prevention and mitigation, shares guidance for screening/response to positive cases, and provides communication resources. You'll find information on symptoms of COVID as well. Here we are just noting the changes based on CDC guidelines.

Key concepts include definitions for screening, care investigation, contact tracing, staying home, and self-isolation. They've also tweaked "close contact" definitions.

An individual can return to school based on 3 conditions:

1. 24 hours with no fever (this is a change; it used to be 3 days);
2. Symptoms improved; and
3. 10 days have passed since symptoms first appeared

OR obtain one acute infection test at an approved testing location that comes back negative,

OR a doctor's note with alternative diagnosis.

The document compares the concepts of Staying Home Vs. Self-Isolation. The purpose of the staying home period is to prevent pre-symptomatic or asymptomatic individuals from spreading the virus. The duration lasts for 14 days from close contact. Self-isolation is to prevent *symptomatic/lab-confirmed* individuals from spreading the virus.

Regarding requirements for parental and public notices, the notices must be posted one or more weeks prior to on-campus activities and instruction and must be on the website. The presentation notes the roles and responsibilities of the superintendent, principal, and nurses. Continue planning with your local public health authorities and ESCs.

The PowerPoint shares screening requirements for teachers, staff, and visitors. Parents are to ensure their students aren't sent to school with any symptoms

Screening apps vetted by TEA:

- Qualtrics
- Luminare, Inc.
- Dr. Owl Health Technologies
- Virtual Care for Families
- Allsynx
- HealthATTEND

You'll also find a flowchart of actions for if an individual tests positive, including what is REQUIRED and what is just recommended. They also have isolation protocols in the presentation.

Additionally, face shields may be used but they are not as effective as masks.

Instructional Continuity Planning Card

Under the [Strong Start Resources](#) card – remember, if you'd like to participate in the Resilient Schools Support Program, your letter of interest is due Friday.

Also, if you click on the [Texas Home Learning LMS Launch](#), you will see the presentation they went over yesterday. They went with the LMS called Schoology, which you will get free for 2 years (but he was unsure of the cost after that). Over 1 million Texas students are currently using it. Districts are listed and include Klein, El Paso, Alief, Spring and Killeen. If you are currently using Schoology, contact your rep to say you want to put your contract on pause to obtain 2 years free, and then you can continue your contract after that. They will be doing a demo of this LMS soon, and there will be additional trainings by ESCs. You as a district will receive 3 attendee seats.

If you're happy with your own LMS, you're welcome to keep it – the same goes for Texas Home Learning.

Special Education Card

The [SHARS Cares Act Provider Relief Fund application](#) must be started by August 3, 2020. That link will take you to the HHS.gov website. If you have questions, email RateAnalysisSHARS@hhsc.state.tx.us.

Changes to Operation Connectivity Bulk Order FAQ

Question 29: Are schools required to follow regular purchasing requirements when paying for technology devices through Operation Connectivity? Can the formal bidding process be bypassed? Is board approval required for purchases over \$50,000?

LEAs and their schools are not required to go through a formal bidding process before participating in the bulk order program. As it pertains to board approval for purchase amounts, this is a local level decision that should be discussed with each LEA's local school board.

Question 30: Can remote locations with internet access be set up for students that live far out in the district and do not have internet access? If we are able to set up Wi-Fi zones at churches around town and out in the rural areas of our school, will this suffice for internet access for the students?

LEAs can set up Wi-Fi zones if they have tested to see if they provide the service needed for virtual learning.

Question 31: Are these purchases of Chromebooks, etc., being made mostly through EMAT?

No. This will be done centrally through direct contracts with Original Equipment Manufacturers (OEMs), then shipped to LEAs based on their confirmed shipping information. TEA is utilizing the \$200 Million CARES Act funding.

Question 32: Will TEA prioritize the deployment of devices to schools starting earlier first?

TEA will not be able to prioritize LEA orders based on current start states or plans, unfortunately.

Question 33: If you can accommodate all students with connectivity and devices but parents want to send their students to school, do you have to have in-person setting during the transition period?

Districts that provide remote, online instructional access to all students are not required to offer on-campus instruction for the transitional period.

Question 34: How do we provide internet to rural homes where there aren't towers so hotspots will not work?

The Operation Connectivity taskforce is currently working on identifying longer-term solutions that can address the broadband availability issue that exists in various LEAs in our state.

Question 35: What is the timeline for distribution of all devices ordered?

They can't make guarantees, but expect a timeline of 4-10 weeks.

Question 36: We bought the hotspots in the spring, but there are additional costs to renew the data past July 31. Is there a way for assistance for the data component?

Costs for data plans are an eligible expense for the state's reimbursement program. Further info coming later.

Question 37: Could you cover the reimbursement aspect of the connectivity plan?

The full details regarding the state's possible reimbursement plan have not been communicated at this time.

Question 38: What is the deadline for reimbursable expenditures under Operation Connectivity?

The full details regarding the state's possible reimbursement plan have not been communicated at this time.

Question 39: Will there be any increase in the state's support of digital connectivity if the surveys reveal that there is an even greater need than previously thought? Further, if COVID-19 continues to linger and remote learning becomes the primary form of instructional delivery, will there be additional grants or funding opportunities from the state/TEA for the ISDs?

TEA will communicate to state leadership if the \$200 million provided won't cover the need.

Questions Answered in Our Chat

- The FAQ says that parents will screen their children and that staff will self-screen themselves. Schools are not expected to take everyone's temperature. You could take a child's temperature (much like we always have) for a student who is symptomatic.
- Are we required to either have an app or written documentation that everyone did their own checklist every morning, or can we have everyone sign an attestation up front stating that they will daily and keep that on file? Would an attestation be enough? Sara Leon advised that she thinks it could be difficult to retain paper copies of a daily screening questionnaire, but that would be an effective way to secure compliance. An attestation would be

a helpful tool to remind parents of their responsibility to self-screen, but may not be as effective as some people may forget over time. There might be a good app out there to manage this. An attestation plus a public information campaign- such as frequent reminders to students and parents via social media, etc., may be helpful in securing ongoing parental compliance.

- For Asynchronous instruction, I understand we have to see them every day or get some sort of work returned. Can we adjust students being present or absent during the week? Example we count them absent at 4:00 PM, but they turn in work at 11:45 PM? Yes. You can turn in attendance once a week for asynchronous learners.
- Are we supposed to screen visitors attending UIL events? Per UIL guidance on their website, you can screen them, but aren't required to. You are encouraged to post signs around the events with symptoms and encouraging anyone experiencing those symptoms to go home.

Other Announcements/Trainings

TACS has updated our website. If you now visit our COVID page, we have added some [school resources including sample plans and videos](#).

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

If your school is in need of sanitization services, please check out services offered by several of our partners, including our new Diamond partner [Germinator Mobile Sanitizing](#) for help!

TACS has unfortunately cancelled our September conference in San Antonio. We hope to be able to offer more webinars and other resources to our superintendents and members throughout the year, and are saddened that we won't be able to hold our event this year!

The local property values survey is due by midnight on Saturday, so be sure to sign on to TEAL to complete and submit.

Transportation report is also due by midnight on Saturday.

We will now be moving to 9:00 AM on Mondays for these meetings starting next week! We plan to continue meeting at 11:00 AM on Wednesdays for as long as they're needed.

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Disclaimer: This information is accurate as of July 29, 2020. It is intended for informational and educational purposes only, and is not a substitute for legal advice.