



COVID-19 Guidance: Provision of Continuous Learning

Introduction

The Continuous Learning Task Force has defined several deliverables that will be completed in the coming weeks and added updates of this guidance document. These include: a template for schools to use when providing voluntary enrichment opportunities and educational services, an expedited approval process for schools that plan to require educational services, a survey of Iowa schools to assess continuous learning needs, and a template for schools not currently engaging in continuous learning. Please check back for the most recent updates.

General Information

Iowa districts and nonpublic schools are working to continue to offer learning opportunities to students while their brick and mortar buildings are closed to mitigate the spread of COVID-19. Many terms are being used to discuss options, often interchangeably, referencing many strategies while using the same word, including terms such as: online learning, e-learning, distance learning, and virtual learning. To reduce confusion, this guidance adopts the term “continuous learning” to encompass any methodology used to extend learning beyond brick and mortar district buildings.

District and nonpublic school provision of continuous learning will vary depending on student needs and district or school resources, including access to adequate internet services. The approach a district or nonpublic school takes will fall into one of two primary approaches: voluntary enrichment opportunities and required educational services. Further description and guidance for each of these approaches is provided in the next section.

Provision of Educational Enrichment Opportunities and Services

	Voluntary Educational Enrichment Opportunities	Required Educational Services
Who can provide this?	Public districts and nonpublic schools.	Public districts and nonpublic schools.
Do we need permission from the Iowa Department of Education to do this?	No.	Yes, an expedited process will soon be available.
Can we require students to participate?	No.	Yes.
What methods can we use?	Online education, home delivery or pick-up of educational resources, online or telephonic check-ins, and other innovative methods.	Online education, home delivery or pick-up of educational resources, online or telephonic check-ins, and other innovative methods.

	Voluntary Educational Enrichment Opportunities	Required Educational Services
Are there equity concerns we should consider?	Yes, equity must be considered. Consideration does not mean that equity is ensured, but that it is provided to the extent possible.	Yes, equity must be considered. IEP teams must reconvene to determine how FAPE will be provided through continuous learning methods.
Can we grade materials submitted?	No, assignment of grades implies recording of student progress towards achieving standards. Teachers may, however, provide feedback.	Yes.
Can we award credit?	No, credit may be awarded for concurrent enrollment courses or credit recovery, however.	Yes.
What is the role of the AEA?	AEAs have multiple resources available to support schools as they identify, develop, and provide educational enrichment opportunities. This includes online resources, materials, suggestions for alternate ways of accessing material, and consultation.	Since the school is considered open, AEA services resume to the extent possible, given the health and safety of all involved.
Is the school considered open?	No.	Yes.
Can we choose to consider work accomplished during school closure in a competency-based system?	Yes.	Yes.
What application/paperwork should the district fill out with the state?	The Voluntary Enrichment Template is an optional tool that districts can use.	The Expedited Application to Provide Continuous Educational Services must be completed and approved by the Department before beginning.

Voluntary Educational Enrichment Opportunities

The educational enrichment approach to continuous learning includes those activities that are provided to students and families while the district is closed. This may include packets, teleconferencing, online instruction, or other outreach activities. Student participation is voluntary and no grading or credit is given.

If this approach to continuous learning is used, any educational enrichment activity should be offered as equitably as possible, taking into consideration the needs of students living in poverty, students with disabilities, and students who do not speak English as their first language. Ensuring that all students have access to educational enrichment activities does not mean that each individual engages in an identical manner or even in identical activities. First priority, of course, is to identify those individuals who could participate if they had the technology. Some districts are finding creative ways to get equipment and internet access to those who don't have them. Once the issue of access to technology is addressed as much as reasonably possible, districts can consider other options such as paper packets with educational enrichment

activities which are adjusted to the needs of the individual (e.g., large print, at individual's reading level, in the native language).

There is no prior approval needed for a district to provide continuous learning through educational enrichment opportunities. Districts will need to consider a number of factors including technology access, staff skills, and student access. Additional resources will soon be available from area education agencies and the Continuous Learning Task Force.

Required Educational Services

Continuous learning through the provision of approved educational services ensures that academic work is equivalent in effort and rigor to typical classroom work. All students are required to participate, attendance is taken, work is graded, and credit granted. Typically, instruction is provided through some type of online learning. Hybrid models of learning, involving some online learning and other methodologies like packets, are also available. These services must be approved by the Iowa Department of Education.

The provision of approved educational services typically requires detailed planning and preparation to successfully implement. Districts will need to consider whether they have adequate infrastructure in at least three areas: technology, instruction, and student engagement. An example of the planning necessary can be found in Wisconsin's [Learning Continuity Readiness Rubric](#).

Some Iowa districts have been working for a number of years to build their capacity to deliver educational services through continuous learning and are ready to use this approach to provide educational services during district closures due to the COVID-19 outbreak. Recognizing this, the Department, in partnership with the Continuous Learning Task Force, is currently developing an expedited process for districts to be approved. The expedited process is anticipated to be ready in the next several days.

Before requiring continuous learning, the Department urges districts and schools to consider the extent to which distance or virtual learning is suitable to all students or the circumstances of all parents. Particularly during the COVID-19 crisis, districts and schools should strongly consider the imposition of any mandate that may frustrate the response to COVID-19.

Ensuring Equity of Access

The United States Department of Education (USDE) supplemental fact sheet (March 21, 2020) highlighted a common misunderstanding regarding educational services during school closures to mitigate the spread of COVID-19. That misunderstanding resulted in school districts around the country concluding, unfortunately and improperly, they could not provide programs or activities at all if they could not provide a guarantee of complete equity.

Due to this global pandemic, these are unusual times with unanticipated difficulties. Perfection is not the standard to be applied; reasonable actions in light of available evidence and resources, as well as the needs of particular children, is the governing legal and practical standard for educational programs or activities. While previous guidance from both the USDE and the Iowa Department of Education sought to highlight the need to ensure equity of access to programs or activities, it was not intended to prohibit or discourage schools from serving the students and families in their communities.

The USDE's supplemental fact sheet does not alter previous guidance from the Iowa Department of Education; rather it encourages broader, innovative approaches, based on processes set forth in Section 504 regulations and the IDEA. Please remember that the USDE's supplemental fact sheet does not eliminate a school district's obligation to consider equity; rather, it states that equitable access may be met in many different ways based on the needs of children, parents, schools, and communities.

Professional Learning for Educators

It is important that any district or nonpublic school engaging in continuous learning provides appropriate professional learning for staff on the methods that will be used to engage with students. Online education, in particular, requires the use of a learning management system (LMS) and differs from face-to-face engagement with students. There are several resources available to schools to access training for staff.

Iowa's AEA's offer professional learning in online education. [AEA OLLIE is available here](#). The Aurora Institute, formerly the International Association for K-12 Online Learning (iNACOL), provides policy and practice resources for online learning. [Visit the Aurora Institute here](#).

Role of the Area Education Agency (AEA)

AEAs were created to provide support and resources to all school districts in Iowa and they remain in that role during the current COVID-19 pandemic. AEAs have multiple resources available to support schools as they identify, develop, and provide voluntary educational enrichment opportunities and/or required educational services. These include online resources, materials, and suggestions for alternate ways of accessing material, consultation, and technical assistance. Schools are encouraged to include consideration of how their AEA staff can support their local continuing education efforts as they are doing their planning. AEA regional administrators as well as their regional staff are available to district leaders as they consider their local possibilities. Examples of how AEA staff may support districts include but are not limited to:

- Assisting districts in identifying instructional materials;
- Helping teachers modify materials, instruction, and activities so that all students can access and benefit from the district's continuing education efforts;
- Consulting with districts as they develop a continuing education plan; and
- Working with districts and schools to ensure that equity is properly considered.

Typical services provided by the AEA to a district, including special education services, resume when schools provide continuous learning through required educational service. These services are provided within a reasonable extent possible, considering health and safety factors related to the COVID-19 outbreak.

Questions and Additional Guidance

If you have questions, please contact your [school improvement consultant](#). If they are unable to assist you, they will connect you with the appropriate person. There will be additional guidance issued on specific issues in Continuous Learning. If there are topics you need additional assistance with, please contact [Amy Williamson](#) so they can be considered for future guidance.