



DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

OFFICE OF THE STATE SUPERINTENDENT OF

**EDUCATION**

## **Flexibility, Stability, & Clarity for Schools & Students During Coronavirus (COVID-19) Pandemic**

### **Frequently Asked Questions for Students & Families**

**April 7, 2020**

#### **Background**

The coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic has caused unprecedented changes in the way we live and learn, including the transition to learning at home in the District of Columbia through at least April 27, 2020. Because students are not physically in school during this time, the DC government plans to provide flexibility around some of the typical regulations that govern how much instructional time students must receive in a given academic year, and around graduation requirements for high school students.

District of Columbia regulation requires that all schools include a minimum of 180 regular instructional days, unless otherwise approved by the Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE). Additionally, to graduate from high school in the District of Columbia, a prospective graduate must earn 24 Carnegie units in required courses. A Carnegie unit means 120 hours of classroom instruction over the course of an academic year. Prospective graduates must also complete 100 hours of community service.

Due to the modified operating status, we know that DC Public Schools (DCPS) and public charter schools may experience challenges in meeting the requirements for instructional days and that there are additional challenges for high school students in meeting graduation requirements.

OSSE plans to exercise its existing authority to extend flexibility to local education agencies (LEAs, meaning DCPS and charter organizations) to shorten the school year and required instructional time. OSSE would also waive the Carnegie unit (or “seat-time”) requirement for high school course credits for any courses in which high school students were enrolled during school closures. Further, OSSE would waive the 100 hours of community service for all prospective high school graduates in the 2019-20 school year.

#### **Frequently Asked Questions**

##### **I’m in high school - how do I know if these changes apply to me?**

The waiver of the community service requirement applies to prospective high school graduates in the 2019-20 school year in any DCPS or DC public charter school.

For the seat time requirement, schools and LEAs are still responsible for ensuring that students have opportunities to complete graduation requirements, even with a shortened school year. All families

should work with their school to understand, access and complete distance learning opportunities during this time. If you have questions about how to complete requirements for graduation during distance learning, please contact your school directly.

**Does the proposal waive any of the course requirements for graduation?**

No. All graduates are still expected to have the required number of credits and courses prescribed in District regulations for graduation. This proposal allows a change in the way credits are awarded, by recognizing the impact of school closures and providing flexibility around the number of hours that students must typically spend in each course. Schools can determine whether or not students have successfully met the learning requirements for a course so they will not be penalized and prevented from graduating by the pandemic and school closures.

**How will students be graded?**

The determination of whether a student meets academic expectations has always been an LEA and school-based decision. It will continue in that manner during this emergency period.

This proposal will allow LEAs to determine whether students have successfully met the learning requirements for a course. Therefore, students will not be penalized and prevented from graduating by the pandemic and school closures.

Students and their families should look to guidance from their school for information on grading and the submission of course assignments.

**Is there the possibility that school will be extended into the summer?**

OSSE plans to allow schools to apply for a waiver so that they do not have to extend the school year. It is possible, however, that schools may make remediation or other learning opportunities available to help students who need extra learning support.

**Is my student required to do work assigned by their school?**

Students should continue to participate in the distance learning provided by their schools to the fullest extent possible. This ensures all students learn and stay on track as much as possible during this challenging time. Each school will share its grading policies and expectations with students and families.

**What if students can't meet the learning requirements of their school?**

This is an unprecedented situation - one we've never faced as a community. Students should participate in the distance learning provided by their schools to the fullest extent possible. Each school is expected to provide policies about grading, promotion and graduation status. We encourage families and schools to work together and to be flexible to best meet the needs of students.

**I want to make sure my student stays on track - what should I do?**

Under this plan, DCPS and DC public charter schools must submit information about how they will provide distance learning opportunities. OSSE strongly recommends that families engage and participate in what schools have provided. Contact your school if you need more information about how the school plans to support your student during this time.

**Why is OSSE waiving the community service requirements?**

The District of Columbia is currently under a stay-at-home order limiting travel outside the home to essential activities only, making community service challenging. We know and appreciate that many students have been hard at work on the community service requirement and that others have already completed it. The unprecedented nature of the current situation requires that we acknowledge some students may be unable to complete this requirement. While we expect that students have completed community service hours throughout their time in high school, not meeting the 100-hour mark will not keep them from graduating this year.

**What if my high school student was in danger of not graduating before the school closures?**

DCPS and charter high schools are responsible for making decisions about whether students are on track to graduate. Changes proposed for this year do not include giving credit for previous courses or failed courses. Please reach out to your school directly to further discuss your student's individual situation, including options for this year.

**How will OSSE make sure that students with an individualized education program (IEP) are being served?**

The waivers for instructional days and flexibility around high school graduation requirements do not lift the requirement for schools to provide a free and appropriate education (FAPE) to students with disabilities. As much as possible given the limitations on physical contact and one-on-one educational services at this time, schools must still serve these students according to their IEP. Leaders across the education community in the District of Columbia are committed to ensuring that students are not negatively impacted by potential challenges accessing remote learning. We will continue to work closely together and stay in communication with parents and families to meet the learning needs of all students.

**Where can I go for more information and resources related to coronavirus (COVID-19) in the District?**

For resources and additional information on the District of Columbia Government's response to coronavirus (COVID-19), please visit [coronavirus.dc.gov](https://coronavirus.dc.gov).