



DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

OFFICE OF THE STATE SUPERINTENDENT OF

EDUCATION

Guiding Principles for Continuous Education

Introduction

As the District of Columbia begins to reopen, the city is looking ahead to a school year that will be unlike any we have experienced before. Local education agencies (LEAs) may offer a variety of in-person and distance learning options to students and families while ensuring that the educational experience for all students is consistent across different settings and transitions between them are seamless. LEAs will be responsible for helping students recover lost learning and mitigate regression that may have resulted from the unexpected closures and shift to distance learning at the end of the 2019-20 school year due to the coronavirus (COVID-19) public health crisis.

While our collective preparations will be rightfully driven by public health considerations, we must also sustain our focus on student learning and growth. We know how hard educators, families and students have been working over the last few months, and have heard anecdotal accounts of students who have benefitted from distance learning. At the same time, early analysis of the impact of COVID-19 closures both [locally](#) and [nationally](#) suggest there could be significant learning loss for students in both math and reading levels as we begin the 2020-21 school year. We are also deeply concerned that existing gaps in outcomes among students could be exacerbated.

DC's education system is obligated to help ensure that this crisis does not set back student learning for years to come. As we prepare for an unprecedented school experience in the 2020-21 school year, we must ensure that all students have access to a safe and supportive learning environment that delivers rigorous and standards-aligned content that prepares our students to succeed in school and life. As the state education agency, the Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE) is committed to supporting LEAs as they prepare to meet this need. Core to this planning effort is setting a clear and high bar for what constitutes a quality, "continuous education" for all students.

What is Continuous Education?

Continuous education takes place when both instruction and learning occur seamlessly across different learning environments, including in-person and remote settings. It requires the development of a coherent and thoughtful plan to ensure that students experience the equivalent levels of rigor and quality, whether engaged in full-time distance learning, full-time in-person learning, or a hybrid or blended approach, alternating between remote and in-person environments. Continuous education also includes periods of emergency when distance learning may be required for all students.

Purpose

These guiding principles are intended to provide LEAs and families with clear and consistent expectations for the continuous education that will take place during the 2020-21 school year. They are intended to help LEAs develop effective and equitable continuous education plans that strive to meet the needs of all students and are developed in partnership with families. They should also support families in understanding what they can expect for their students and the two-way communication that schools should establish with them. While the guiding principles acknowledge certain legal obligations, they extend well beyond that. They offer a target for excellence rather than a floor for compliance.

Structure

This document is organized by pillar, guiding principle and indicator.

- **Pillar:** The three pillars capture the most critical areas of focus for LEAs in preparing for continuous education: High Expectations, Equity and Access, Family Engagement.
- **Guiding Principle:** Each pillar encompasses two to four guiding principles. The guiding principles collectively set a vision for excellence in the context of continuous education.
- **Indicators:** Each guiding principle is further subdivided into indicators that help describe what each guiding principle looks like when implemented effectively.

The Three Pillars of Continuous Education

- **High Expectations:** LEAs should maintain high expectations for all students and establish a coherent academic foundation for their continuous education plan that upholds existing academic standards while ensuring continuous use of rigorous curricula and ongoing assessment of student progress.
- **Equity and Access:** LEAs should address the social, emotional and mental health needs of all students and meet the unique needs of diverse learners with a particular focus on students with disabilities and English learners (ELs). LEAs should ensure access to needed technology to enable full participation in continuous education.
- **Family Engagement:** LEAs should treat families as critical partners in continuous education, providing them with ample opportunities to inform decision-making and establishing clear and accessible lines of two-way communication.

Pillar One: High Expectations

1.A: Content Standards

Expectations for all students should remain high and consistent regardless of their learning environment.

- LEAs should ground instruction in the District of Columbia’s approved [state academic standards](#) in English language arts, math and science across grades K-12.
- LEAs should use rigorous, standards-aligned curricula across all learning environments that are consistent with their educational philosophy.
- LEAs should assess student performance on the previous year’s standards at the start of the school year with validated, formative assessments and use these results to inform planning and instruction, particularly for those students with the most significant learning gaps.
- LEAs should ensure that robust systems of evidence-based, academic intervention and support take place across all learning environments, with a focus on helping accelerate the learning of students with the most significant learning gaps.
- LEAs should maintain policies for credit attainment and graduation requirements while ensuring that high school students continue on their paths to graduation and a successful post-secondary transition.

1.B: Delivery of Instruction

The methods for delivering instruction across all learning environments, including both in-person and remote settings, should be user-friendly, coherent and consistent.

- LEAs should plan for and document the core components of their continuous education plan, describing how the LEA will deliver instruction in a user-friendly, coherent and consistent manner across all learning environments, and how the LEA is prepared to transition seamlessly across learning environments as the public health situation evolves. This plan should address at a minimum:
 1. The learning environment options available to students (i.e., in-person, remote, hybrid).
 2. The medium(s) in which instruction is delivered to students in remote settings.
 3. The manner in which any resources - technology, instructional platforms, books, supplies - are delivered to students or families.
 4. The expected hours per day for synchronous learning (i.e., learning that happens in real-time with the student and teacher together) versus asynchronous learning (i.e., independent learning that takes place without real-time input from the teacher).
 5. The staffing model and master schedule used to deliver instruction and interventions.
 6. The training and professional development for staff to support the effective implementation of the plan.
 7. The manner in which accommodations are provided consistent with applicable laws pertaining to students with disabilities and English learners.
 8. The manner in which student work is collected, recorded and evaluated.

9. Tracking and record-keeping methods for attendance.
 10. The approach for evaluating the continuous education plan and its implementation as well as using this feedback to drive continuous improvement.
- The continuous education plan, including the balance between synchronous and asynchronous learning, should be consistent with the LEA's educational philosophy and informed by the availability of technology among students, reasonable expectations for family involvement, age appropriateness, and feedback from families.

1.C: Feedback on Student Work¹

Students and families should have a clear understanding of student progress toward defined learning objectives.

- LEAs should assess student work that is completed across all learning environments not only for completion but also for how well the student has mastered defined learning objectives.
- LEAs should provide regular written feedback on student work to students and families on a cadence that is consistent across all learning environments.
- LEAs should provide students and families with regular updates on overall student performance and progress.

1.D: Student Attendance

Attendance should, at minimum, be tracked daily for all students.

- LEAs should have at least one touchpoint daily with every student.
- LEAs should track and record student attendance daily in accordance with [OSSE's 2020-21 school year attendance guidance](#).
- LEAs may also have other methods for documenting period-based attendance or student engagement and should communicate those expectations to families and caregivers.

Pillar Two: Equity and Access

2.A: Whole Student Supports

Addressing the needs of the whole student is essential for effective learning and remains an important function of LEAs, now more than ever.

- LEAs should ensure continuous access to nutritious food for all qualifying students regardless of their learning environment, either through meal service managed by the school and/or through referral to community resources.
- LEAs should build positive school climates and provide trauma-informed, social-emotional supports across remote and in-person learning environments for both students and staff to foster connection and belonging across every school community.

¹ We acknowledge that the involvement of families in receiving feedback on student work should be appropriate to the age of the student. For adult charter schools, the expectation is that feedback will be shared with the student only.

- LEAs should continue to identify, refer and monitor students with mental health and other non-academic support needs across all learning environments.
- LEAs should review and update their student support policies as needed, including those pertaining to [suicide awareness and prevention](#), sexual harassment, [prevention of sexual abuse by school staff](#), [discipline](#), [antibullying](#), and [mandated reporter requirements](#) to ensure applicability across all learning environments. These policies should be publicly available, easily searchable, and in a user-friendly format.

2.B: Students with Disabilities

Students with disabilities retain all rights consistent with the law and should have their unique instructional and related-service needs met.

- Within the first two weeks of the school year, LEAs should plan for and communicate to families about how they will shift resources, policies and practices to ensure continuity across remote and in-person learning environments in referring, evaluating, identifying and supporting students with disabilities while complying with [Individuals with Disabilities Education Act \(IDEA\)](#) and [state policies](#).
- LEAs should partner with each student’s family and use data to develop or amend and execute individualized education programs (IEPs), as appropriate, taking into account how each student’s needs for instructional and related services will be addressed in both remote and in-person learning environments as well as the family’s need for training to support their student.
- LEAs should investigate and implement all possible flexibilities in related-service delivery such as telehealth.
- LEAs should meet the unique needs of students with disabilities who are in the care of the DC Child and Family Services Agency (CFSA) and juvenile justice and adult incarceration settings, including supports that contemplate IEP implementation in unique environments.

2.C: English Learners

English learners (ELs) retain all rights consistent with the law and should have their unique instructional and language needs met.

- Within the first two weeks of the school year, LEAs should plan for and communicate to families about how they will shift their resources, policies and practices to identify and support ELs across remote and in-person learning environments while complying with [federal civil rights and education law](#) and [state policies](#).
- LEAs should prepare to identify ELs in a timely manner, including re-screening all students who were screened provisionally while in a remote learning environment using state-approved English proficiency screeners as soon as possible once the student is able to attend school in person.
- LEAs should implement their EL program plans with fidelity across both remote and in-person learning environments to advance the linguistic and academic goals of ELs and have a system in place that draws upon multiple data sources to evaluate and refine their EL program.

- LEAs should communicate with families in a language they understand, to the extent practicable, in compliance with [Title I](#) and the [Language Access Act](#).

2.D: Access to Technology

All students should have appropriate, secure and adequate access to the technology needed to participate fully in continuous education.

- LEAs should take steps to determine the nature and extent of device and internet access among their student body.
- LEAs should expand access to appropriate and necessary devices as well as internet service required to enable continuous education for all students, particularly for those who are homeless or are in the care of the District.
- LEAs should put in place a technology security plan to help ensure the appropriate and responsible use of devices.
- LEAs should provide adequate, timely and appropriate technical support to students and staff.
- LEAs should uphold all relevant laws and regulations concerning [student privacy](#) and data security in the use of this technology.

Pillar Three: Family Engagement²

3.A: Family Partnerships

Families should be engaged as critical partners.

- LEAs should engage families early and often in developing and refining their continuous education plans using multiple and diverse methods of engagement; they should also demonstrate how they are responding and making changes based on family feedback.
- LEAs should provide families with clear expectations for how the continuous education plan will be implemented and the role that families can play in supporting their students' learning.
- LEAs should provide trainings and/or resources to support families with facilitating learning at home, consistent with the expectations for family involvement in their continuous education plan.
- LEAs should take into account any new technology that families will be required to use in the development of their continuous education plan and provide appropriate training to families.
- LEAs should train staff on culturally responsive teaching and family engagement to cultivate effective partnerships with students and families.

² We acknowledge that family engagement should be appropriate to the age of the students served. Adult charter schools should consider every reference to families as inclusive of adult learners as well.

3.B: Family Communication

Communications to families should be proactive, accessible, and two-way.

- LEAs should develop an accessible, family-facing description of their continuous education plan that is available on their website and distributed directly to families and students as early as possible in the school year.
- LEAs should share with families the results of the formative assessments for their student(s) and provide information about academic interventions and supports as well as how they can be requested.
- LEAs should develop and implement a continuous education communications plan that includes multiple modes of frequent and proactive outreach. The plan should also incorporate opportunities for feedback to support continuous improvement.
- LEAs should translate family-facing documents into the major languages spoken by their families and make available interpretation services for in-person and virtual meetings with families, to the extent practicable and in compliance with the [Language Access Act](#).
- LEAs should make available on their website in an accessible and easily searched format contact information for key points of contact, including technical support, language access, school administrators, special education staff and teaching staff.

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