# State Board of Education Provides Districts with Flexibilities to Operate Schools in the 2020-21 School Year

NEWS RELEASE

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JACKSON, Miss. – The Mississippi State Board of Education (SBE) suspended several policies today to give local school districts scheduling flexibility for the 2020-21 school year to deal with the impact of COVID-19.

State law requires schools to provide 180 days of instruction each school year. Local school districts are responsible for designing school schedules that best meet the needs of their communities. School calendars, including the first and last day of school and school holidays, are set at the district level.

The SBE policy suspensions will allow districts flexibility with their scheduling to comply with Mississippi State Department of Health and Centers for Disease Control (CDC) guidelines for managing the COVID-19 outbreak.

For the 2020-21 school year, districts may meet the 180-day teaching requirement by implementing one or more of three scheduling options for operating schools: traditional, virtual or a hybrid of in-person and distance learning. The types of schedules may vary among schools in the same district to meet the different learning needs of students in elementary, middle and high school.

To help districts develop class schedules, the number of daily instructional hours required has been reduced from 5.5 hours to 4 hours per day.

For high school courses that offer Carnegie unit credit, the 140-hour instructional requirement for one-credit courses and the 70-hour instructional requirement for half-credit courses will be waived if the district develops a plan to ensure students master the course content. The plan must be approved by the local school board and posted on the district's website by September 30, 2020.

The SBE also suspended the policy requiring districts to seek a waiver from the SBE or the Commission on School Accreditation if they are unable to comply with state-mandated student-teacher ratios.

Policies that remain for the 2020-21 school year include:

- Districts must establish graduation requirements for the 2020-21 school year prior to the first day of school. Those requirements must meet the state's minimum graduation requirements.
- Local school boards shall establish criteria for the academic promotion/progression/retention of students for the 2020-21 school year prior to the first day of school.
- Local school boards shall establish uniform grading policies for the 2020-21 school year prior to the first day of school.

The Mississippi Department of Education (MDE) has partnered with a workgroup of nine superintendents from a diverse range of school districts to outline the key issues districts need to address to reopen schools. Earlier this week, the MDE released Considerations for Reopening Mississippi Schools, which outlines a three-month timeline of strategies for superintendents and principals to consider to plan for the start of the 2020-21 school year. The document is intended to be used as a resource and starting point for districts to consider local needs in collaboration with stakeholders. It will be updated in three-month intervals to adjust to changes with the COVID-19 outbreak.

"The MDE will continue to support districts during this summer planning phase and once schools reopen," said Dr. Carey Wright, state superintendent of education. "We are working in consultation with the Office of the Governor, the Mississippi State Department of Health and the Mississippi Emergency Management Agency to ensure that schools open safely and so they can provide every student with the high-quality education they deserve."

For a complete list of policy suspensions for the 2020-21 school year, view the policy suspension chart: https://bit.ly/3cTuUUn

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