Maine DOE Newsroom

PRIORITY NOTICE: Update from Commissioner Makin 3-25-20

Dear Champions of Education,

We are hopeful that the Governor's message yesterday afternoon will help our state to slow the progression of the coronavirus and ultimately allow us to avert some of the catastrophic situations we're seeing in other regions. We've been receiving several questions about whether education and nutrition services provided by local schools are considered to be essential, and the answer is that they are essential. Certainly it is advisable to have as many staff members as possible working from home, but CDC guidance (Maine and national) continues to recognize the importance of continuing to provide essential services and continues to recommend careful hand washing, avoiding large groups, and generally keeping a 6' bubble of space from others.

In response to many questions and concerns from the field, here are some clarifications:

MINIMUM NUMBER OF DAYS for the SCHOOL YEAR: The minimum number of school days will be waived for the 2019-2020 school year.

STATE ASSESSMENT SYSTEM AND ESSA ACCOUNTABILITY: Maine has applied for, and has received, waivers that eliminate state assessment requirements for this year.

CERTIFICATION: Extensions of up to 1 year will be provided for renewal applications that have been impacted by COVID-19 disruption.

PRE-SERVICE / EDUCATOR PREPARATION PROGRAMS: In lieu of certain coursework, practicum, and/or internship requirements, DOE will accept recommendations from educator preparation programs regarding the qualifications of pre-service educators who

are currently in a educator preparation program/certification program that has been disrupted by COVID-19.

PEPG: DOE will not hold SAUs accountable for compliance with state statute/regulations regarding professional growth / supervision & evaluation systems. Enforcement of locally developed and/or adopted policies, programs, and systems remain at the discretion of local SAUs.

IDEA/SPECIAL EDUCATION SERVICES: We recognize that it is reasonable for schools and districts to be at different places when it comes to providing continuity of education for all students. It has only been a few days, and we're hearing that some districts were up and running with a full program on "day one" and that others are still working hard to get the necessary materials, plans, logistics, and systems in place. We have also heard that (in Maine and across the nation) some school leaders are hesitant to offer any services until they are able to support full IEP accommodations.

We urge you to provide the best programming you can for all students and to offer as many accommodations as possible to facilitate universal access. FAPE under more "traditional" circumstances likely looks different from FAPE under a state and national emergency that has temporarily redefined what public education looks like. IEPs were based on a set of basic circumstances one would expect in a traditional school setting, and education for all students is very different right now. Fear of putting forth anything short of perfection at this time will immobilize you and your teams of educators when you most need to be proactive and innovative.

Please check out our most updated guidance and resource page for Special Education: **https://www.maine.gov/doe/learning/specialed/covid19** As always, our specialists at DOE will be glad to answer your questions and to assist you as you move ahead with offering educational programming to all of the students in your care. Nobody should be feeling alone in this, so please connect as often as needed.

SCHOOL BUS DELIVERIES of MEALS and ACADEMIC MATERIALS: Just when you think there couldn't be another rule or statute to trip over as we find our way through all of this… guess what? Turns out that the flashing lights on buses must only be used when school-aged passengers are on board. Please ask your transportation team to just pull over and use a regular blinker when making deliveries.

CDC NOTIFICATIONS to SUPERINTENDENTS and SCHOOL NURSES WHEN POSITIVE COVID CASE IS IDENTIFIED: Due to the current workload involved in investigating and monitoring positive cases of COVID-19, the multiple means of testing, and the prevalence of

community transmission in some areas of the state, it is possible that both families of students and/or staff members will have notified schools before Maine CDC staff does. It is also likely that they (the student or staff) will know the preliminary result before the Maine CDC does. Because of this, Maine CDC can no longer guarantee that the superintendent and school nurse will be notified of a positive COVID-19 case. The Maine CDC and Maine DOE will do their best to communicate as we are able with school staff as quickly as possible. If you learn of a positive case in your school community (staff or student), please contact Emily Poland, our Nurse Consultant at DOE at **emily.poland@maine.gov**. She is working with CDC to provide a model letter for school leaders to use as they notify others of a positive case.

We hope these clarifications are helpful, and we will keep you updated as the situation progresses. Please don't hesitate to reach out to the specialists at DOE for support and/or guidance regarding these updates or any other concerns and questions.

Thank you for all you do,

Pender

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