



STATE OF NEW JERSEY

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

A Memo from the New Jersey Department of Education

Date: March 5, 2020
To: Chief School Administrators, APSSD's, Charter School and Renaissance School Project Leads, Administrators of Nonpublic Schools
Route To: Building Principals, School Nurses, School Staff
From: Lamont O. Repollet, Ed.D.
Commissioner of Education

Guidance Regarding Requirements for Public Health-Related School Closure

On March 2, 2020, the New Jersey Department of Health (NJDOH) published guidance for childcare facilities and K-12 schools regarding the impact that the current outbreak of 2019 Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) might have on their communities. That guidance is available on the [NJDOH's COVID-19 Information for Schools and Businesses webpage](#) and was disseminated by the New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE) via special Broadcast on March 3, 2020. The guidance emphasizes that the most important thing for schools to do now is **plan** and **prepare**. Among other planning procedures, the guidance advises that "schools may be asked to close preemptively or reactively, therefore schools should be making plans for what to do if there are recommendations for closing schools or cancelling events."¹

To better assist boards of education and board of trustees of a charter or renaissance school (hereinafter referred to as board(s) of education) with these other preparation activities recommended by the NJDOH, the NJDOE is providing the following guidance regarding requirements for public health-related school closure.

Requirements to Implement a Public Health-Related School Closure

NJDOH guidance identifies school closure as a potential strategy to limit transmission within a community. In the event a board of education is provided *a written directive by either the NJDOH or the health officer of the jurisdiction to institute a public health-related closure*, the board of education may utilize home instruction to provide instructional services to enrolled students. The provision of home instruction services should be guided by *N.J.A.C. 6A:16-10.1* and may include direct services, online instruction, services provided through contract with another district board of education, or any other means developed by the district to meet the needs of its students. *Any day in which students impacted by a public health-related closure have access to home instruction services provided consistent with the guidance in this memo will count as a day in which the board of education has provided public school facilities toward its compliance with the 180-day requirement in accordance with N.J.S.A. 18A:7F-9.*

¹ For additional information, please consult NJDOH's full guidance document. See, particularly, the following excerpt:

Will schools be asked to close if there is a COVID-19 outbreak in the community?

- Non-pharmaceutical interventions (NPIs) are strategies that can be used when other measures like treatment or vaccines are not available to combat an emerging illness with pandemic potential.
 - School closures and school dismissals are two recommended strategies to limit transmission within the community.
 - During school dismissals, childcare programs and schools may stay open for staff (if not ill) while students stay home. This allows teachers to develop and deliver lessons remotely and for other staff to continue to provide services.
- Schools may be asked to close preemptively or reactively, therefore schools should be making plans for what to do if there are recommendations for closing schools or cancelling events.
- Childcare and school administrators should work closely with local health officials when making decisions on dismissals or closures.

To be clear, this flexibility to count a day on which public school facilities are closed toward the board of education's statutory 180-day requirement applies strictly to public health-related school closures and not to any other type of closure or other days on which public school facilities are not made available. Closures made absent a written directive from either the NJDOH or the health officer of the jurisdiction will not count.

All boards of education should develop a school health-related closure preparedness plan to provide home instruction in the event of such a closure. The planned services should include equitable access to instruction for all students. Each preparedness plan should also address the provision of appropriate special education and related services for students with disabilities and the provision of school nutrition benefits or services for eligible students. The preparedness plans should be submitted to the Executive County Superintendent. The NJDOE also encourages boards of education to adopt enhanced school cleanliness and disinfection protocols, including disinfection of frequently touched surfaces and objects.

Stigma Related to COVID-19

According to the CDC, "stigma and discrimination can occur when people associate an infectious disease, such as COVID-19, with a population or nationality, even though not everyone in that population or from that region is specially at risk for the disease." In this climate, fear and anxiety surrounding COVID-19 can lead to stigma toward Chinese, other Asian Americans, and the Jewish Community. The NJDOE encourages all educators and members of the public to recommit to raising awareness of the deep educational and personal harm brought by stigma, bullying and harassment in our schools, and to spreading factual public health information without fear or stigmatization.

c: Members, State Board of Education
Garden State Coalition of Schools
NJDOE Staff
Statewide Parent Advocacy Network
NJ LEE Group