

CORONAVIRUS DISEASE 2019 (COVID-19)¹: KEY PREPAREDNESS AND RESPONSE CONSIDERATIONS

Continuity of Operations (COOP) Planning for Education Agencies:

Ensuring Continuity of Teaching and Learning During Prolonged Absences, Dismissals, and Closures

COOP PLANNING – AN OVERVIEW

For schools, continuity of operations (COOP) planning means preparing to support the whole school community in the event of **short- and long-term student and staff absences, school dismissals, and/or school closures**. The COOP plan — contained in what is known as an “annex” within a school emergency operations plan (EOP) — will describe how a school or district will work to provide for the **continuation of essential services during prolonged absences caused by emergencies** (e.g., an infectious disease outbreak, natural disaster, or power outage).

As outlined in the [Guide for Developing High-Quality School Emergency Operations Plans](#), the [COOP Annex](#) aligns and is integrated with the EOP, as it

- Promotes health and safety;
- Includes mitigation strategies that aim to “[eliminate or reduce the loss of life and property damage by lessening the impact of an event or emergency](#);” and
- Strives to maintain mission-oriented activities, including teaching and learning for the whole school community in the context of **day-to-day operational disruptions**.

Effective COOP planning for schools is done in collaboration with community partners, since school systems often play key roles in community preparedness plans, especially response and recovery initiatives. As a part of **COVID-19** planning, it is recommended that school planning teams create or update their COOP annexes.

Continuity of Teaching and Learning Action Items

- ✓ Recognize the importance of planning for continuity of teaching and learning in the face of planned and unplanned disruptions and begin planning now.
- ✓ Integrate continuity of teaching and learning into your EOP’s COOP Annex.

¹ According to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, this novel coronavirus is named “SARS-CoV-2,” while the disease it causes is named “coronavirus disease 2019” (COVID-19). (Available at <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/summary.html>, last accessed March 9, 2020.)

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- ✓ Plan for continuing education strategies for students, taking into consideration varying grade levels, age levels, skill levels, and access and functional needs.
- ✓ Consider incorporating varying tools, technologies, formats, and approaches to distance learning.

A critical component of a school system's COOP planning is the **continuation of teaching and learning services in response to planned and unplanned disruptions for individual students, staff, and the whole school community**. Examples of disruptions include prolonged individual absences and broader school dismissals and school closures.

School closures cease active teaching and learning originating from school buildings and most school community services hosted on school grounds. A few personnel may continue working to provide essential services, e.g., ongoing communications with the school community and preparing to reopen schools.

The term "school dismissals" typically connotes an in-service professional day, with the school system "open" and operating, while students are dismissed from school into the custody of their families, guardians, or prearranged care. School dismissals may factor into a school's **coronavirus** response. For example, if isolation and greater [social distancing](#) are recommended by public health professionals (suggesting a restriction on activities or locations where large numbers of people congregate), or if a case of **COVID-19** is identified in a member of the school community, schools and their health partners may decide to dismiss students. In this situation, educators may still be able to report to school to support the ongoing teaching and learning of students from there. For instance, teachers could be at the school developing, preparing, implementing, and monitoring 2-week units with related lessons plans, student activities, and assessments.

In this scenario, and in locations where it is possible, distance learning would ideally be sustained throughout the length of the closure. This may be accomplished through the administration of preplanned lessons and the use of alternative communication platforms, self-paced learning, and independent assessments.

REVIEW AND UPDATE PLANS TO PREPARE FOR CONTINUITY OF TEACHING AND LEARNING

School districts and schools are encouraged to **prepare** their distance education plans now so they are ready to be immediately activated in the event that **school closure, dismissal, or the prolonged absence of student and staff** is necessary.

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The following pages provide details that can support school systems in developing a COOP Annex, along with examples of types of comprehensive teaching and learning materials for use in support of the whole school community if an emergency causes prolonged absences, school dismissals, and school closures.

CONTINUITY OF TEACHING AND LEARNING: KEY CONSIDERATIONS

Prepare for short- and long-term school closures or absences and varying circumstances.

Should the need arise to close a school for an extended period, or for students to have extended absences, it is ideal for education agencies to have distance learning options that can fulfill needs across a range of time frames. Whenever possible, programs should be adaptable based on changing needs and circumstances. Rather than creating a distance learning program solely for a short-term absence (e.g., for a student missing 3 days of school due to the flu), develop a flexible program that may be scaled to allow for a change in circumstance (e.g., a student's 3-day absence that is unexpectedly extended by the school closing for 2 weeks).

Schools can prepare for short- to long-term closures or absences, individual absences, prolonged school dismissal, or closure for up to 2 weeks or more. Extenuating circumstances that may arise during an extended school dismissal and closure would also need to be accounted for within a COOP Annex. For example, families may have to travel to help ensure their well-being or move closer to extended family for additional support. This may cause inadvertent delays as families return to the school community. Schools can help mitigate the effects of this by activating the Communications and Warning Annex and continually communicating status information, ongoing initiatives with partners, and health and safety policy changes to the whole school community.

Build from existing from people, curricula, programs, and resources.

School emergency management and continuity planning teams must include administrators, educators, and more in order to properly assess which tools work best for their schools and/or districts based on the anticipated length of closure, current resources available, student access, and grade level.

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District administrators and school educators will have a tremendous set of knowledge and insight for creating distance education programs. Special educators are one example, since they often design individual teaching and learning plans for students with health conditions; lead extended services curricula design and implementation; and have expertise in continually creating and providing accommodations and modifications to help ensure that all students grow and succeed academically.

Consider in-person and virtual programs and curricula across all grades to identify possible resources. For example, many textbook series include access to additional learning activities in multiple formats and multiple languages; use them as a resource. Review materials from additional programs such as extended school year services, tutoring, mentoring, and coordinated initiatives with afterschool learning centers. Some school systems are designing [blended instructional models and personalized learning](#) programs in everyday school and classroom settings. Blended learning programs that offer online and offline approaches will serve as key models that education agencies can use.

Incorporate state policies and resources on online learning.

We also recommend that education agencies consider state and local policies and related resources and programming, as applicable. As schools and districts develop COOP annexes, it is important to consult respective state policies to ensure that plans are aligned.

Feature multiple formats.

While technology plays a notable role in classroom education today, distance learning programs should feature diverse instructional methodology or formats that account for students who may have limited or no access to the Internet, phone lines, TV, radio, or other electronic device in the home environment. As general curriculum materials are created, it is also necessary to consider how they may be adapted so that the whole school community may access the materials, including students with disabilities and special needs.

Incorporate assessments.

To ensure that distance learning programs are successful, build assessment opportunities into all lessons. This will allow education agencies to monitor whether students are successfully meeting learning goals, while also demonstrating progress toward meeting academic requirements for passing grades or graduation.

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Provide for the whole school community.

This includes both ensuring accessibility and serving all age groups and grade levels.

Ensuring Accessibility. When planning distance learning tools, it is important to help ensure that the learning needs of all students are addressed. Educators can begin by reviewing the existing accommodations and modifications that are described in a student's [Individualized Education Plan \(IEP\) and Section 504 plan](#). Additional strategies can be identified and developed collaboratively with input from special educators. It is important to also consider [Section 508 of the American Disabilities Act](#), which provides accessibility guidelines for individuals with disabilities. This dictates when materials must be provided in alternative formats to ensure access for all.

Serving All Age Groups and Grade Levels. Instructional design, course design, and plans for support must be aligned with the skill level of age groups. For example, those serving the elementary and middle school levels might have to consider creating instructional materials for both students and parents, while high school students are likely more capable independent learners.

Support systems training.

Training is necessary for faculty, staff, students, and parents on the use of systems that will support continuity of teaching and learning. Ideally, training should occur at regular intervals during nonemergency times to ensure that full understanding of the systems exists before they need to be deployed. Further support may be provided with continued access to training or technical assistance throughout a dismissal.

As any online learning is considered, students, staff, and families should be given training materials to help ensure cybersecurity and cyber safety throughout a possible dismissal.

Key Questions to Ask When COOP Planning

- What technologies do we already have available?
- What training materials will we need to create? And for what audiences?
- What individuals will be involved in the training and tutoring process on technologies and systems selected?
- What role does cost play in determining short- and long-term solutions?

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Distance Education – Planning Principles Checklist

Prepare for short- and long-term school closures or absences and varying circumstances	
Build from existing people, curricula, programs, and resources	
Incorporate state policies and resources on online learning	
Use multiple teaching and learning formats	
Incorporate assessments	
Include the whole school community	
Support systems training	

EDUCATOR TOOLS TO SUPPORT DISTANCE EDUCATION

The following list includes a range of tools and modalities for facilitating distance learning, including those with no, some, or great levels of technological sophistication. It is important to consider a variety of methods to allow for the possibility of restricted access to technology and limited communication by educators, students, and families. As educators consider a diverse set of instructional methodology, they should also consider a diverse set of performance formats. To support families, related supplies should be included.

Printed Materials: *Textbooks, photocopies of reference materials, and assignments can be prepared in advance for distribution to affected students.*

Instructional Packets. In contrast to online instructional tools, hard-copy packets have the benefit of not requiring technology for use.

In advance of a prolonged school closure or student absence, teachers can prepare hard-copy instructional packets that students may use at home to continue their learning. Hard-copy packets may include written instruction; content narrative; worksheets; calendars or schedules of work to be completed; directions for homework, projects, or written assignments; excerpts from textbooks or other reading materials; and sample assessments.

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Teachers may take two different approaches when developing packets, according to how much advanced notice they have before a school closure or prolonged student absence: (1) generic packets that can be used at any point in the school year that promote student learning according to grade-level and subject-specific standards, or (2) unit-specific packets that are based on the planned curriculum and integrated with the lessons that students are currently learning in class.

Instructional packets can facilitate many of the everyday accommodations and modifications for students to help ensure access to the general, distance education environment. When preparing instructional activities, educators can use packets to provide an alternate format and modified presentation (e.g., additional content further breaking down the content, examples, added formatting for clarity).

Instructional packets can include the necessary resources students will need to complete the instructional activities. For example, educators should consider including any necessary tools, such as mathematics tools (compass, protractor, and graph paper); particular types of paper for handwriting assignments; and materials for art projects and presentations.

If families will be requested to submit work over time, packets should clearly outline expectations and possible methods for submitting work.

Teacher Check-ins and Tutorials: *A variety of technologies (telephone, email, Web conferencing) can be used to facilitate one-on-one and teacher-and-class interaction or lesson delivery between students and teachers, counselors, and other appointed adults (e.g., tutors) during prolonged absences or dismissals.*

Telephone and Video Calling. School leaders can use existing conference call lines or set up lines in advance to continue communication with teachers. Teachers can also use these lines to hold group and individual discussions, or even teach lessons, with students in a secure and private setting. Administrators can use telephone and video calling to support the distribution of notifications and to provide information to students, faculty, and staff during a prolonged closure. School staff can also consider carving out a portion of the school day to conduct outreach to individual students and families, as well.

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Email. Schools and school districts can use their existing email service provider to send, receive, and track messages. In the event this service provider is not operating, response teams can use other online systems that allow quick distribution of multimedia content to a mass audience. A variety of free email service providers is on the Web, including Google, Yahoo, and Hotmail, most of which support document sharing, scheduling, and Web chats.

Web Conferencing. A variety of free Web conferencing services is available. Schools and school districts can consider setting up an account for use in cases of emergency, when distance learning methods are needed, and may consider hosting mock conference calls and meeting sessions via one of these services in the event of an emergency.

Social Media. Many students, parents, faculty, and staff use social media on a daily basis for personal use, but it can also serve as a vehicle to send announcements about lessons, grade uploads, teacher absences, and other information that supports COOP planning. Social media can be useful during both short- and long-term closures, particularly because it can be easy to access on different devices, including cell phones, tablets, and computers. Some schools may have existing accounts with social media sites. Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, and Instagram are all examples of free social media sites schools can use.

Wiki Sites. A wiki site is a Web-based application that supports data collection, information sharing, and content revision in a collaborative platform. Participants in a wiki site can add, delete, revise, or review content in cooperation with others. Teachers might find these spaces useful, as they can store classroom lessons, grade papers, and communicate with students via wiki sites. Further, teachers can promote student collaborative learning with wiki sites by instructing students how to use these sites for projects. Some providers, such as Wikispaces, even offer platforms for school districts to create a “campus” space in which they can track the information from different schools, house information, and share it with students, faculty, staff, and parents.

Recorded Class Meetings: *Using audio or video technology, recorded class meetings can be given to some or all absent students via podcasts, live or on-demand television, DVD, captioned closed-circuit or public access television, or online.*

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Public Broadcast Television Stations and Radio. In times of large-scale school closures or emergencies, schools may have the option of partnering with local and public access television and radio stations to communicate with students and families. These transmissions can provide distance learning lessons in themselves or information on how distance learning will continue (i.e., referrals to other systems or resources).

Digital Audio Recorders. Teachers can use these devices to record segments of courses for electronic distribution to students (e.g., as email attachments, through file sharing technology, or even as a podcast). Alternatively, digital audio recordings could be uploaded to USBs, CDs, or DVDs if not all students have Internet accessibility outside of school.

Online Materials or Other Aligned Content: *Digital copies of textbooks, reference materials, assignments, and audiovisual learning supports can be made available on the Internet using online learning platforms and Websites (e.g., school Websites).*

Slide Presentation Software. PowerPoint and other similar desktop-based software applications can be used to hold lesson content, audio recordings, and hyperlinks, in the event that students have access to the Internet. If students don't have access to the Internet or computer speakers, teachers can distribute supplemental materials and go over lessons over the phone.

Learning Management Systems (LMSs). These robust systems allow teachers to share and store numerous instructional materials, including assignments, worksheets, calendars, and assessments; track student progress and grade work; send messages and notifications to students; facilitate discussions with students using blogs and/or discussion boards; conduct online class meetings; and much more. Your school or district may already have an LMS in place that can be utilized in the event of an emergency. Blackboard, SharePoint, and Moodle are all commonly used LMS types.

School-Specific Websites or Blogs. In the event of an emergency, a Website or blog could serve as the main information center for a school or classroom. Educators could use Websites or blogs to disseminate assignments and assessments to students, as well as to facilitate discussions among students. If such functions are normally enabled by an LMS (e.g., Blackboard), a more basic Website or blog could serve as a backup service if a school's or

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district's server goes down and the LMS hosted by that server is unavailable. The Website or blog link could be distributed to students, faculty, staff, and parents via email, telephone, social media, or any other selected communication medium. Many free blog service providers are available on the Web that require limited technological expertise, and/or the school's own Website could serve as a well-known source for this type of information dissemination.

[U.S. Department of Education's #GoOpen Initiative](#)

The U.S. Department of Education, Office of Educational Technology (OET) leads the [#GoOpen](#) initiative, which supports states and districts choosing to transition to the use of openly licensed educational resources to transform teaching and learning. The initiative brings to the forefront an array of teaching and learning materials, data, and educational opportunities available without restrictions imposed by copyright laws, access barriers, or exclusive proprietary systems that lack interoperability and limit the free exchange of information. Schools can learn more at by visiting the OET Web page, <https://tech.ed.gov>, or going to <https://goopen.us/goopen-stories/>.

Free Instructional Materials. Many organizations offer free instructional materials on their Websites that support teaching and learning. Many Federal and state government agencies and institutions make available free classroom materials, as well. From space to agriculture, there are agencies supporting classrooms nationwide. This is especially true as more partners are established to help grow STEM and STEAM programs — science, technology, engineering, arts, and mathematics programs. These readily accessible online materials may be helpful in the event of a prolonged school closure if teachers and students do not have access to classroom materials.

Websites With Free Instructional Materials

- [Smithsonian Learning Media](#)
- [National Geographic Education](#)
- [Smithsonian Education](#)
- [National Education Association Lesson Plans](#)
- [Library of Congress](#)
- [Stem Rising](#)

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Free Online Courses for K-12 Students

- [Khan Academy](#)
- [EdX](#)
- [Canvas Network](#)

Massive Open Online Course (MOOC). These open-access and Web-based courses provide users with an interactive and immediate learning experience that is focused on group collaboration and automated feedback. Along with viewing and hearing learning content, users can participate in discussion forums and take assessments. There is no limit on user participation, and many of the MOOCs available online are free.

KEY RESOURCES

Find a description of and link to some of the key resources referenced throughout this document below:

- **Biological Hazards Web Page.** Access the latest resources from the CDC, ED, and other Federal and national partners to support your response to COVID-19. https://rems.ed.gov/Resources_Hazards_Threats_Biological_Hazards.aspx
- **Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) Situation Summary.** Get the latest details from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention on the background, source and spread of the virus; illness severity and risk assessment; and the current situation in the United States. <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/summary.html>
- **Guide for Developing High-Quality School EOPs (School Guide).** Learn how to integrate the recommended six-step planning process for high-quality EOP development into your activities. https://rems.ed.gov/docs/REMS_K-12_Guide_508.pdf
- **Tips For Social Distancing, Quarantine, and Isolation During An Infectious Disease Outbreak.** The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration created this tip sheet to answer common questions related to social distancing, quarantine, and isolation. <https://store.samhsa.gov/system/files/sma14-4894.pdf>
- **Protecting Student Privacy While Using Online Educational Services: Requirements and Best Practices.** This resource provides recommendations specific to student privacy in online settings. <https://studentprivacy.ed.gov/resources/protecting-student-privacy-while-using-online-educational-services-requirements-and-best>