

# Questions from WVEA Tele-Town Hall Meeting 7/15/20



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**1. Special education students have a variety of extra concerns to take into consideration: inability to wear masks due to sensory issues, inability to social distance due to aid needed to complete tasks, teaching them virtually, etc. How will these issues be addressed?**

Any student who cannot wear a mask or face shield due to a medical condition, including those with respiratory issues that impede breathing, a mental health condition, or disability, and students who would be unable to remove a mask without assistance are not required to wear face coverings. Individuals who are communicating or seeking to communicate with someone who is hearing impaired or who has another disability, where the ability to see the mouth is essential to communication, are not required to wear a mask; however, individuals should consider using another type of face covering such as a plastic face shield.

When a student with an IEP applies to a virtual instruction program, the IEP Team will meet to review the student's IEP in full and consider the appropriateness of virtual instruction options relevant to the special education and related services needs of the student.

**2. How will counseling services be affected by the laid-out guidelines? Should we look into hiring more counselors in order to help students during these trying times?**

School counseling services will continue either in the school setting or remotely. If district wide remote learning is implemented by the Governor, counselors should be prepared to use alternate ways of reaching and being available for students, including Teams or other virtual means. Other sources for mental health services that counties can utilize include Communities in Schools, social workers, and other community health entities. Counties have the option of using funds appropriated by the Legislature or CARES Act for these purposes.

**3. My husband and I work in different counties. If one of us must be quarantined, all of us will. Will sick days be used? And what if we are quarantined more than once?**

School employees are entitled to 80 hours of paid sick leave under the Emergency Paid Sick Leave Act (EPSLA) provisions of the Families First Coronavirus Response Act for certain COVID related issues. This leave is in addition to other leave entitlements earned by county employees. Employers may not require employees to use provided or accrued paid vacation, personal, medical, or sick leave before the emergency paid sick leave. If a health care provider has advised an employee to self-quarantine due to concerns related to COVID-19 ESPLA leave may be used.

**4. I have multiple medical conditions that make it difficult for me to breathe while wearing a normal mask. Will the department provide other options like positive pressure masks?**

The West Virginia Department of Education will not provide masks or face coverings. Counties may provide them for all employees. Employees also have the option to wear their own face coverings, including face shields.

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**5. I can understand keeping smaller children just three feet apart, but what about the older children? Especially during meals, shouldn't we be keeping them six feet apart rather than three feet?**

WVDE explains that when social distancing is not possible, students are in congregant areas, or outside of their core groups, face coverings should be used. Schools and counties are required to establish lunch schedules and procedures that maintain cafeteria capacity at a 50% maximum threshold including spaced meal serving lines (marked on floors); spaced seating; and additional meal periods for more staggered meal delivery.

**6. Where do students go if they have a temperature and no one can be contacted at home?**

Schools should utilize the same procedures that are used when students with other illnesses are present at school. Care should be taken to ensure that the students who show symptoms are isolated or appropriately distanced from others with appropriate supervision.

**7. I am a driver's ed teacher. There is no way to social distance while in a car so how will that work?**

Typical driving arrangements may need to be altered, particularly in communities where there are active COVID cases. Additional guidance will be forthcoming.

**8. Will physical education teachers get some kind of guidance or training on how to conduct those classes?**

We will work with WVDE staff to determine if guidance is needed separately for physical education teachers; however, the requirements of social distancing and face coverings would apply the same as in the classroom setting for various programmatic levels.

**9. Will the change of the start date affect when we will be paid?**

The majority of counties have developed revised calendars that will not result in a delay in the start of the teacher's pay schedule. The West Virginia Department of Education has encouraged counties to be mindful of unexpected gaps in teacher pay when determining the first day of the employment term for professional and service employees. The West Virginia Department of Education will communicate any relief available from the statutes creating these gaps if and when it is granted.

**10. When children 9 and under are not required to wear a mask, how are you going to keep their teachers and aides safe?**

According to the CDC, younger children are less likely to contract or transmit COVID-19 than older students. Teachers may choose to wear face coverings or face shields for their own protection and some county plans will actually require when face coverings must be worn by students and staff.

**11. Special education students generally join the mainstream classroom for things like art, music and gym. If they are unable to do that how will you guarantee the special education students still have access to those things?**

Additional guidance regarding special education students is forthcoming.

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**12. If a foster child contracts COVID-19 at school, what will be the legal liability for the foster parent? Have you been in touch with DHHR about this scenario?**

Issues related to foster children and families are under the purview of DHHR.

**13. On the health checklist that nurses will be using, can we add questions about mental health to alert the school counselors of any social/emotional needs?**

School nurses can make inquiries regarding mental health and work with counselors and other school mental health providers to align students with needed supports and services.

**14. What should an educator do if they themselves do not have an underlying health condition, but someone they live with at home does and they are afraid of bringing it back home to them?**

Employers will need to examine documentation from a health care provider to determine whether any work accommodations are required.

**15. How do we maintain social distancing with the 50% hands on rule?**

If referring to hands on projects, follow guidance regarding manipulatives and sanitizing or segregating materials. If referring to Pre-K, follow guidance related to classroom play and materials.

**16. For those that are in more than one building throughout the day, will they be allowed extra sick time for quarantining since they have the ability to be exposed much more often?**

The only leave available to employees is personal leave per W. Va. Code § 18A-4-10 and leave provided through the Families First Coronavirus Response Act (FFCRA).

**17. Who will be responsible for supplying masks and cleaning supplies for each classroom?**

Appropriate cleaning supplies and masks for students will be supplied by counties.

**18. It seemed as though we can only use the CARES time if we have no sick time to use. Is this correct? And if so, would that be a grievable situation?**

School employees are entitled to 80 hours of paid sick leave under the Emergency Paid Sick Leave Act (EPSLA) provisions of the Families First Coronavirus Response Act for certain COVID related issues. This leave is in addition to other leave entitlements earned by county employees. Employers may not require employees to use provided or accrued paid vacation, personal, medical, or sick leave before the emergency paid sick leave.

**19. From my understanding, PreK will not be considered for virtual learning. If virtual learning is the option that made for students, what will happen to those who have jobs in PreK? Will those employees lose their jobs?**

W. Va. Code § 18-5F-4 provides the authority for virtual school offerings in grades Kindergarten through 12. County boards of education may offer Pre-K services via alternate means to provide additional support to these students; however, Pre-K is voluntary for parents.

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**20. The latest information from Wetzel County's superintendent said interventionists would have to provide push in services. How can this be considered safe since those students are supposed to be only with their core groups all day?**

Services from traveling teachers may be implemented with appropriate safety protocols in place.

**21. Are any special considerations being made about students who live with grandparents and could possibly bring COVID-19 back to them?**

Schools will be open to students only if it is deemed safe based on community health metrics. Families also have the option to consider virtual school programs if they deem it to be appropriate for them.

**22. If we see that our district or school is not in compliance with stated health and safety measures and we report that up the chain of command, will we be protected from retaliation by our administrators or others?**

Any employee who has questions about health and safety protections in his or her school is encouraged to discuss the issue with administrators.

**23. Are there any plans to help expand child care for those of us with school age children? For example if we have a hybrid model and I have to be in my buildings every day but my children only 2 days?**

Teachers are encouraged to work with their individual counties to determine whether there are additional options for teachers.

**24. What will the protocol be if no substitute picks up the job you posted? In the past we have split classes, but that would now mean more students in a classroom.**

Counties will need to plan for this contingency in a manner that respects health and safety requirements in effect in each school.

**25. Since school start date was pushed back to September 8, does the teacher start date get pushed back also?**

Employee start dates will be adjusted by counties.

**26. Will the teachers be given the option to teach in person or remotely?**

Counties will determine when teachers are needed to provide virtual instruction, it will not be a unilateral decision that can be made by teachers on an individual basis.

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