**PREPARING FOR THE FLU: DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION RECOMMENDATIONS TO ENSURE
THE CONTINUITY OF LEARNING FOR SCHOOLS (K-12)
DURING EXTENDED STUDENT ABSENCE OR SCHOOL DISMISSAL**

As the CDC releases its "[Guidance for School Responses to Influenza During the 2009-2010 School Year](#)," the U.S. Department of Education ("the Department") wishes to remind states, districts, schools, students, staff, families, and communities alike about the importance of ensuring the continuity of learning in the event of student or school dismissals.

The purpose of this document, therefore, is to provide recommendations to help schools maintain the continuity of learning for 1) individual or small groups of students who are out-of-school for extended periods and 2) large groups of students disrupted by school dismissals or large numbers of faculty absences.

These recommendations present considerations for education stakeholders to plan for and improve their ability to provide continuous learning ranging from take-home assignments to online learning capabilities. It offers key questions for states, districts, school leaders, teachers, parents, and students, as well as provides resource opportunities and best practices.

There are a number of reasons why students may be out-of-school for extended periods. For example, schools may pursue *selective* dismissals of students at high-risk of flu complications (to prevent the spread of flu to vulnerable communities), *reactive* dismissals (when a significant proportion of students in school have a documented fever), or *preemptive* dismissals (to proactively decrease the spread of flu). Whatever the reason and regardless of the duration of such interruptions, all education stakeholders should consider the effects of significant absences on student achievement and establish plans that not only ensure health and safety, but also maintain a continuity of learning.

Options to get the material to students who are at home

We are mindful that available resources will play a part in determining how each school creates its continuity of learning plan. This framework offers several options, all aimed at helping districts, schools, and teachers plan and execute distance learning with whatever resources they have or are able to obtain. The strategies outlined below range from sending copies of assignments home with students to web-based distance learning coursework. Specifically, they include:

- **Hard copy packets**: Photocopies of reference materials, curriculum, and assignments can be prepared in advance for distribution to affected students;
- **Online materials or other aligned content:** Digital copies of reference materials, assignments, and audio-visual learning supports can be made available on the Internet using e-learning and other Learning Management Systems (LMS) (e.g., school websites, etc.);

- **Teacher check-ins and tutorials**: A variety of technologies (telephone, email, web conferencing) can be used to facilitate one-on-one interaction between students and teachers, counselors and other appointed adults (e.g., tutors) during prolonged absences or dismissals;
- **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;
- **Live class meetings:** Schools can use available tools such as conference calling or webinars, online courses, or virtual schools with two-way interaction between the teacher and students;
- **Other student supports:** Schools can use any of the above methods to promote non-classroom priorities, such as college and other counseling support, including student loan preparation (Free Application for Federal Student Aid) or study groups that are enabled through web-based tools.

Considerations for ensuring continuity of learning

The following four guiding questions will help districts and schools develop learning continuity strategies and action plans:

1. How will affected parties communicate during individual or prolonged absences or during school-wide dismissals?
2. How will students understand and access available academic resources and other supports from home?
3. What equipment and other resources are available or need to be acquired to enable school and district learning continuity plans?
4. What additional training or experience is required to prepare all parties to respond appropriately when needed?

A decision table attached to these recommendations (Appendix A) includes detailed questions that will lead schools, districts, and states to inventory instructional content and available technology; evaluate educator, student, and parent readiness to participate successfully in distance learning; and evaluate state and district operating plans to support various distance learning options.

Potential resources and partnerships to close the gaps

Some states, districts and schools have some or all of the resources and capabilities to fully develop and implement their continuity of learning plans; however, most will require additional planning and support to ensure these strategies are effective across all schools and student populations. To assist in these efforts, the Department has assembled tools from prior state and district responses to similar circumstances (see Appendix A). The Department also has requested that a range of providers prepare to respond to state and district requests for assistance to increase the accessibility of resources, including technology to all affected parties. These tools and resources include:

- **Comprehensive learning continuity planning and implementation support**: Guidance regarding how to develop and implement a systematic plan, including technology resources to ensure that all students can learn in a variety of environments;
- **Physical instructional resources**: Publishers and other instructional material providers that can help make content available in hard copy to students unable to physically attend school;

- **Digital instructional resources:** Publishers and other instructional material providers that can help make content available digitally so that it can be shared via email and through other web-based tools;
- **Organization and distribution of digital content:** Technology that offers tools and systems to share not only instructional content, but also teaching and learning experiences via the Internet;
- **Phone conferencing**: Conference calls to allow teachers to interact with multiple students simultaneously using the telephone;
- **Webinar support**: Web-based technology that allows teachers not only to interact with multiple students on a conference call, but to also simultaneously show students instructional tools such as literature passages or math solutions on a shared Internet site;
- **Online courses and virtual classrooms:** Electronic, learning communities where students and teachers interact in real time using web-based tools;
- **Virtual server capacity**: Companies willing to provide technology to store and deliver large amounts of instructional content using the Internet.

By reflecting on how existing tools may be used to develop effective distance learning strategies and accessing new resource opportunities, schools and districts can sustain student attainment and achievement during prolonged absences or school dismissals. The Department will post a full list of these resources on its website at http://www.ed.gov/h1n1flu.
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Appendix A: Continuity of Learning – Decision Table[1]

Instructional delivery options	Considerations	Resource Opportunities[2]
General planning to ensure continuity of learning	- Are there distribution plans to ensure student access to resources in the event of sudden absences or school closure? - Are contact information records for students, parents, guardians, and all staff (email addresses, physical addresses, phone numbers, including mobile, etc.) on file and do teachers have access to that information to check-in with absent students regarding academic progress? Are policies regarding privacy and sharing of personal information in place and clear to all parties? - How can schools and districts leverage distance learning resources from other sources, including current vendors, community colleges and universities, and online sources of open content? - Are policies in place for awarding credit and articulation of courses in the event of sustained distance learning (i.e. credit without seat time, credit if courses are taken online from a commercial provider or from another district)? - Are there defined staffing plans to support distance learning in the event of small or large student or faculty absences? - Will staff be permitted to return to school to use school-based equipment and resources?	- Comprehensive learning continuity planning and implementation support - US Department of Education Readiness and Emergency Management for Schools (REMS) Technical Assistance Center: http://rems.ed.gov - Los Angeles County Office of Education: Continuity of Instruction Resources - Standards for online programs in schools: http://www.inacol.org/resources/docs/KeepingPace07-color.pdf
Hard copy packets	- Are adequate resources or agreements in place to support copying and distributing learning packets and materials for students to use at home for up to 12 weeks if necessary? - Are adequate resources or agreements in place to support copying and distributing learning packets and materials for students to use	- Physical instructional resources - www.free.ed.gov: federally supported teaching and learning resources from dozens of federal agencies

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[1] Some considerations, such as an inventory of tools to support distance learning apply to multiple instructional delivery options.

[2] While these resources are relevant to the Department's mission, they are available from a variety of sources and their presence here does not constitute an endorsement by the Department.

Instructional delivery options	Considerations	Resource Opportunities[2]
	at home for up to 12 weeks if necessary? - Are districts working with textbook publishers and the relevant education vendor community about ways to provide free, or near free education services (materials, take home kits, etc.) to meet the needs of affected students, including students with disabilities and students with limited English proficiency, and schools?	
Online materials or other aligned content	- Can instructional materials and assignments be posted online? - Have districts contacted local business leaders about donating, loaning, or renting equipment to fill gaps identified by inventories (e.g., used or low-cost laptops, mobile broadband cards, webcams, etc.)? - What is the speed and scale of internet capacity to be used by students and teachers? How many people can connect to web-based material at one time? - Are systems in place to develop and provide materials in alternative formats suited to meet the needs of students with disabilities and to accommodate students with limited English proficiency?	- Tools to organize and distribute digital content - Virtual server capacity - North American Council for Online Learning (NACOL) Online Clearinghouse: http://www.edgateway.net/cs/nacol/print/docs/437 - San Diego County Office of Education: http://www.sdcoe.net/news/07-10-25_Home_learning.asp
Teacher check-ins and tutorials	- Have plans been created with teacher input for teachers to conduct telephone conferences with students, parents, or guardians to review student progress, assignments, as well as provide tips for building structured learning time at home?	- Phone conferencing
Recorded class meetings	- Are there contingency plans to incorporate captioned close-circuit, public television, web-based tools, or cable channels to deliver live or pre-recorded lessons?	- Digital instructional materials - Wisconsin Educational Communications Board: http://explore.ecb.org/ecbschema/plsql/ITVSCHED2?sched=04262009
Live class meetings	- If districts or schools pursue conference calls or web meetings, what	- Webinar support

Instructional delivery options	Considerations	Resource Opportunities[2]
	technology is needed centrally and for users (phones, computers, Internet, and webcams)? If not currently available, how will it be acquired? - Have teachers taught a class or portion of a class via distance learning? Are they familiar with the tools? Have they developed or can they access the necessary content and technology? - Have students participated in distance learning? Are they comfortable with the tools? Can they access the necessary resources? For example, have they visited the Learning Management System or school website from their home computer or another off-campus computer? Do students with disabilities have the necessary assistive technology? - What tools to support distance learning do students and staff have access to at home or other accessible sites (e.g., phone, cable television, computer, internet, high speed internet, Mp3 players, DVD players, assistive technology, etc)? - What tools to support distance learning does the district or schools have (audio conferencing, Mp3 players, computers, web conferencing, e-learning, or LMS, etc.)?	- Online courses and digital classrooms - Arkansas Distance Learning Development Program: http://ardl.k12.ar.us/Pages/Default.aspx - National Education Association Guide to Online High School Courses: http://www.nea.org/home/30103.htm
Other student supports	- Have teachers or guidance counselors developed plans to ensure that time sensitive supports for students are available (e.g., FAFSA preparation, ACT/SAT preparation)? - How will lessons and materials be accessible to all students, including students with limited English proficiency or students with disabilities? - Have district or school officials contacted local business leaders about adjusting work schedules so that caretakers are able to be at home in the event of prolonged school dismissals?	- New York City Learn at Home Instructional Activity Guide: http://schools.nyc.gov/Academics/learnathome/default.htm - Guidance on accessible materials: http://nimas.cast.org/

Districts and schools should also consider inter-school and inter-district partnerships by compiling and sharing best practices, available resources, and commonly agreed-upon online resources across jurisdictions.