

## **Planning for Potential School Closures**

**NOTE:** This document was compiled by the U.S. Department of Education (ED) in September 2009 in response to inquiries from the field regarding H1N1 and the possibility of potentially prolonged school closures.

During this time period, many of ED's active list serves were discussing issues related to H1N1 and continuity of education in the event of prolonged school closures. Accordingly, we compiled some of those shared resources, as well as other information and resources that are available in the public domain, on these topics. This document is not intended to be a comprehensive resource, but, merely to provide some general considerations for planning, as well as some examples from the field.

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There are many issues to consider when faced with the possibility of prolonged school closures. The U.S. Department of Education works closely with our Federal, State, and Local partners to consider these issues and to identify resources for local educational agencies (LEAs) across the country. Decisions regarding school dismissals and closures are determined at the local level, based on information from State, Local, and Federal authorities. We encourage you to continue to visit: Flu.gov's "[School Planning](#)" Web site and ED's H1N1 Web site accessible at <http://www.ed.gov/admins/lead/safety/emergencyplan/pandemic/index.html>, where the Federal Government will continue to post updated information to help inform your local decisions.

In addition to Federal resources, you should also consider available State and local resources and partners if you have not already done so. For example, you may want to check with your State education agency since many have been identifying resources and developing supports for their local education agencies. Local businesses, such as bookstores, or media outlets, may also be of assistance to you in promoting or supporting your continuity of education efforts. Building relationships and creating agreements now will help identify and mobilize a broad array of partners if the need arises.

### ***Considerations for Planning***

A broad array of both technological and non-technological opportunities may be used to provide continuing education during school closures. This may include the use of radio or public broadcast television stations, conducting class via telephone conference calls, phone tutoring, or sending "educational packets" to student's homes. These materials can all be developed in advance of an emergency, and, then can be on hand for easy distribution in the event of an extended closure. A combination of both may supplement traditional education, allowing students to maintain skills while they remain at home.

Many schools and school districts already utilize Web sites to share information with staff, students, and their families. Schools may also already be using online grading systems that allow teachers to post assignments, grades, distribute homework, and correspond with students. These systems can be expanded to intentionally facilitate learning during prolonged closures. Web sites may even be used for posting reading assignments for classes, or, for taking online tests.

In some cases, schools may also already be employing technology, such as distance learning, which may be utilized during a prolonged school closure. Distance learning is the use of electronic means to distribute materials or training for education. Materials already developed for distance learning programs may potentially be used by your school district to provide similar lessons during a school closure.

Finally, it is important to keep issues of access in mind when developing your continuity of education plans. For example, do the students in your district have ready access to computers and the internet in their homes? If not, perhaps informational packets would be more effective. In that case, what will your district's plan be for distributing and collecting the packets? How will all students be reached? Do your students speak other languages? What approaches are age-appropriate? What will be most acceptable to the families in your community?

Many of these issues can be discussed and worked out in advance, and we encourage you to work with your key stakeholders – public health partners, parents, teachers, students, emergency management professionals, nurses – to do as much of this work in advance as possible.

To assist with the identification of possible subjects, courses, or materials, the U.S. Department of Education supports the Federal Resources for Educational Excellence Web site at: <http://www.free.ed.gov/>. This Web site offers more than 1,500 federally supported teaching and learning resources from dozens of federal agencies. New sites and links are added regularly, so we encourage you to check back often.

Because continuity of learning is a critical component of school emergency management planning and is essential for keeping students on track with their learning while at home, the *U.S. Department of Education (ED)* has developed a set of resources to help schools maintain the learning process in the event of prolonged school dismissal. These resources include a set of recommendations and resources for developing continuity of learning programs, policy guidance, a question and answer fact sheet, as well as a public service announcement. The following resources are presented at ED's H1N1 Web site, accessible at <http://www.ed.gov/admins/lead/safety/emergencyplan/pandemic/index.html>:

- “Department of Education Recommendations to Ensure the Continuity of Learning for Schools (K-12) During Extended Student Absence or School Dismissal”
- “Preparing for the Flu During the 2009–10 School Year: Questions and Answers for Schools”
- “Guidance On Flexibility And Waivers For Seas, Leas, Postsecondary Institutions, And Other Grantee And Program Participants”
- Additionally, Secretary Duncan created a Public Service announcement describing how to reduce the risk of getting the flu and how to avoid falling behind if you are absent or if your school is dismissed, accessible at <http://www.ed.gov/news/av/video/2009/flu.html>.

In addition, ED's Readiness and Emergency Management for Schools (REMS) Technical Assistance (TA) Center, as well as ED's various local, State, and Federal partners, have

identified some resources and practices that we wanted to share with you and that you might consider reviewing:

- In December 2007, OSDFS hosted a webinar called “**Continuing Education during Prolonged School Closures**” after several school closures in San Diego, California due to wildfires. Jess Martinez and Jim Esterbrooks, with the San Diego County Office of Education, discussed how the county and schools addressed continuing education during the closures. The County utilized both the local cable television station and the County’s education Web site to provide subject-by-subject, grade-by-grade materials for students impacted by the closures. The Web site provides reading lists for all students and online resources for language arts, math, science, and history/social science.
  - A listing of these resources can be found on the San Diego County Office of Education Web site at [http://www.sdcoe.net/news/07-10-25\\_Home\\_learning.asp](http://www.sdcoe.net/news/07-10-25_Home_learning.asp).
  - To view the full transcript of the call, visit [http://rems.ed.gov/views/documents/OSDFS\\_Teleconference\\_2007\\_12\\_18.pdf](http://rems.ed.gov/views/documents/OSDFS_Teleconference_2007_12_18.pdf).
- The Los Angeles County Office of Education has created an “Emergency **Preparedness: Continuity of Instructions**” book. It is intended to present information and resources that school and districts can use in developing their local plans to provide for continuity of instruction in the event of a pandemic or other emergency that could result in significant student and staff absences, and possible school closure. It is available at: [http://www.lacoe.edu/includes/templates/document\\_frame.cfm?toURL=documents&id=7838](http://www.lacoe.edu/includes/templates/document_frame.cfm?toURL=documents&id=7838).
- Colorado’s Department of Education developed standards of quality for online programs in schools. (<http://www.inacol.org/resources/docs/KeepingPace07-color.pdf>.)
- Oregon has several laws already established regarding online learning. These include qualifications for teacher distance learning courses, television, radio, and distance learning. A listing of online learning programs in Oregon is provided via the **NACOL Online Learning Clearinghouse**, which is a comprehensive effort supported by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and WestEd to provide a listing of online learning laws by state as well as online learning programs in the United States. It is available at: <http://www.edgateway.net/cs/nacol/print/docs/437>.
- In response to the H1N1-related school closures in the spring of 2009, New York City Department of Education created “**Learn at Home Instructional Activity Guides**” for students and families to support the teaching and learning process. The guides include suggested schedules, activities, resources, and strategies for documenting academic accomplishments. The guides are accessible on-line at <http://schools.nyc.gov/Academics/learnathome/default.htm>.
- The **Wisconsin Educational Communications Board**, in conjunction with the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, developed weekly program schedules that can be broadcast on local public television stations in Wisconsin to continue education at

home in the case of school closure. The weekly schedules include program descriptions along with links to supplemental materials that include teacher guides and Web sites for additional reading. These materials can be accessed online at

<http://explore.ecb.org/ecbschema/plsql/ITVSCHEM2?sched=04262009>.

- **PBS, *Public Broadcasting System***, offers numerous educational resources and programs for students, parents, and teachers alike that are accessible via television and the internet. To view program descriptions and schedules, and related media, go to <http://www.pbs.org>. To find your local station and its web site, accessible at <http://www.pbs.org>, also directs users to local stations and their sites to and local stations can be identified at [www.pbs.org/stationfinder/](http://www.pbs.org/stationfinder/).
- In 2005, the Arkansas Department of Education established the **Arkansas Distance Learning Development Program**. Distance learning in Arkansas is offered either through compressed interactive videoconferencing (CIV) or through web-based, online courses. Arkansas's K-12 distance learning curriculum portal provides a variety of links to courses offered through the program. Access the information online at <http://ardl.k12.ar.us/Pages/Default.aspx>.
- The **National Education Association's (NEA) *Guide to Online High School Courses*** provides overall framework to consider when adopting online instruction. It includes overarching questions in assessing online high school courses and checklists for various constituencies to consider when creating, adopting, or administering online courses. As a complement to this guide, the NEA also developed *The Guide to Teaching Online Courses*. Both guides are available online at <http://www.nea.org/home/30113.htm> and <http://www.nea.org/home/30103.htm>.
- The Mississippi Department of Education has gathered numerous education resources supporting the teaching and learning process that include applicable lesson plans, hand-outs, activities and online learning sources which may be useful creating technological and non-technological instructional activities. The collection of resources is accessible at <http://www.mde.k12.ms.us/resources.htm>.

**(PLEASE NOTE:** The preceding resources are not intended as endorsements, and are merely offered as examples of other programs or efforts existing in our nation that you might take into account as you move forward in your own planning efforts.)

Please also continue to check the Department of Education's Web site, where we will be posting additional information about promoting continuity of learning, as well as guidance on addressing the needs of special education students during an H1N1 outbreak and potential school dismissal.