



Frequently Asked Questions for Parents and Families about Continuous Learning

This resource answers many common questions from parents and families as schools develop plans for implementing continuous learning opportunities for students. These are unusual times with unprecedented difficulty for schools, families and students. The Iowa Department of Education (Department) will continue to be diligent in our efforts to ensure we have the supports available to provide local school districts with the flexibility to best address the needs of their students, families and communities. If your question is not answered in this resource, please email your question to iadepstofed@iowa.gov and we will update this list regularly.

1) What is the definition of “Continuous Learning” for the remainder of this school year?”

- A. “Continuous learning” means any methodology used to extend learning beyond brick and mortar district buildings -- online learning, e-learning, distance learning, and virtual learning. The range of instructional methodologies should meet the unique needs of all students and school districts.

2) My school is requiring distance learning. What does that mean?

- A. This means your school is requiring students to participate in instruction. Attendance will be taken, lessons offered and grades administered. Exactly how the school will administer the required distance learning -- whether online, paper packets, etc. -- is up to them and will be based on the needs of the students in your school.

3) My school is offering voluntary educational enrichment programs. What does that mean?

- A. This means your school will be offering programs that further students' learning, but student participation is voluntary. Schools cannot give grades or take attendance.

4) My school has chosen not to offer any educational enhancement or services right now. What does that mean?

- A. It means that your school will be making up instructional hours or days at a later time to be determined in consultation with the Iowa Department of Education.

5) Why aren't you requiring all school districts to offer continuous learning?

- A. We strongly encourage all school districts to provide as much support as possible to help students continue to learn. At the same time, we understand these decisions are best made locally by people who know their communities, students, and families best.

- 6) If a school district decides to offer voluntary educational enrichment opportunities will they have to make up for the missed days of instruction?**
- A. No. Only school districts that choose neither the voluntary nor required tracks for continuous learning will need to make up instructional time. At this point, all have reported they will offer some form of continuous learning opportunities for their students.
- 7) How will students make up the hours that they miss if their districts do not choose either the voluntary or required option?**
- A. Those districts will need to work with the Department of Education to address this question depending on the circumstances at that point in time. Hours or days may be added to the current year or potentially the next school year, with an exception for graduating seniors.
- 8) What happens to students who can't access courses online, or who do not participate for other reasons, such as getting COVID-19?**
- A. Continuous learning is not necessarily delivered online; it may also be delivered by providing paper packets to kids and families and/or using teleconferencing. If a school does use online options they will need to have paper-based alternatives for students who do not have access to Wi-Fi or a device. We want schools to do their best to engage every student, and to be as flexible as possible by recognizing individual circumstances.
- 9) Will the state provide pre-packaged lessons/curriculum to school districts?**
- A. No. The state does not provide curriculum and lessons, but the Area Education Agencies already provide excellent resources to help districts put together lessons or packages of materials.
- 10) Could school districts come back and hold mandatory summer sessions?**
- A. That would be up to the local school district depending on circumstances at the time. We will look at ways the Iowa Department of Education could support summer learning if that is what school districts want to do.
- 11) If a school district requires continuous learning services, could it be in violation of civil rights laws for students on Individualized Education Programs (IEP)?**
- A. Schools will need to have alternatives, such as paper packets, telephone conferencing, or video conferencing, for students who are unable to participate in online learning. We want schools to do their best to engage every student, and to be as flexible as possible recognizing individual circumstances. Furthermore, the [Iowa Department of Education](#) and the [United States Department of Education](#) have stated that continuous learning is compatible with civil rights protections for students with disabilities.
- 12) How can school districts offer continuous learning opportunities if they cannot provide a guarantee of complete equity for all students?**
- A. Reasonable actions in light of available evidence and resources, as well as the needs of particular children, is the governing legal and practical standard for educational programs or activities. The United States Department of Education's supplemental fact sheet (March 21, 2020) addresses this, and while it does not eliminate a school district's obligation to consider equity during this time, it does state that equitable access may be met in many different ways based on the needs of children, parents, schools and communities.
- 13) Many students do not have access to the internet. If my district chooses required learning, isn't the achievement gap going to grow?**

- A. Schools have the option of providing other means of instruction, including paper packets that can be handed out. Whether a district chooses voluntary or required learning, districts must demonstrate that every effort is being made to reach all students. The Iowa Department of Education is surveying schools to help identify and address barriers school districts face in implementing continuous learning programs.

14) E-learning needs to be offered! Our students are missing out. Other states have it. Why not Iowa?

- A. Some districts have the capacity to offer e-learning to all students. Others are not as well equipped. That's why districts are being provided a wide berth for how they provide continuous learning.

15) Will high school seniors still be able to graduate and receive a high school diploma?

- A. Gov. Kim Reynolds signed a proclamation on April 10 that included an action that suspends state graduation requirements for high school students who are on track to graduate this spring.

Regardless of the option a school uses to provide continuous learning opportunities for students, this order will let high school students graduate this spring even if they have not completed all their credit hours or required courses (such as U.S. government or U.S. history). This is meant for students who would have graduated but for the COVID-19 emergency, and is not a free pass to graduation for students who would not have graduated regardless of the COVID-19 emergency.

16) What if a school district has a local policy with additional requirements for high school graduation that exceed what the state requires?

- A. School districts may need to address this with their local school boards and make a change to their local policies if their graduation requirement policy exceeds the state's requirements.

17) Will students have to make up instructional time in the summer?

- A. If a district chooses not to provide either voluntary or required continuous learning, then, yes, instructional hours would have to be made up at a time when public health concerns allow that to be done. This decision is made on the local level.

18) My district has chosen to provide voluntary continuous learning. Since it's voluntary, many students will be falling behind. How do you justify that?

- A. It is the Department's intention that all districts will engage their students with rigorous, appealing educational opportunities in a way that will ensure maximum participation and enrichment. We know that all districts want to do well by their students.

19) If my school provides continuous learning opportunities through the Required Educational Services option can they grade courses on a pass/fail basis? I don't want my high school student to miss out on scholarship opportunities.

- A. It is a local decision to determine how to grade and offer credit. This has always been the case and is not changed by the COVID-19 response. Iowa's Regent universities and all colleges the

Department has spoken with are accepting pass/fail or pass/no pass grades for admission, understanding that there has been a disruption to educational services this year.

- 20) With the cancellation of spring sports, you've said a decision will be made on summer sports by June 1. Could that decision be made sooner?**
- A. Yes. If public health conditions allow, we'll make that announcement sooner than June 1. We know that schools are the heart of their communities in many ways, including extracurricular activities.
- 21) Will a decision also be made on other school-sponsored activities besides sports that normally take place in the summer by June 1?**
- A. Yes. IDPH will offer guidance on when schools may introduce all school-sponsored activities that usually take place in the summer by June 1, and sooner if public health conditions permit.
- 22) Schools have been busy getting their continuous learning plans up and running, and now you want them to prepare and submit a Return to Learn Plan. How will the Department of Education help schools do that?**
- A. We know Iowa educators share a strong commitment to helping students catch up. Schools have until July 1 to submit their Return to Learn Plans, in accordance with recommendations of the Continuous Learning Task Force. The Education Department will provide guidance and technical assistance as needed by school districts and nonpublic schools.
- 23) What else must the Return to Learn Plans include at a minimum, particularly for the 2020-21 school year?**
- A. This plan also should include how the school district plans to address the needs of learners as a result of the COVID-19 disruptions to learning. This may include options for summer school, enrichment activities or other learning opportunities.
- Plans will also take into account students' academic and social-emotional learning and mental health needs and include considerations for school staff safety and wellness. They should also include support for students with disabilities, students who are English language learners, students at-risk and students living in poverty.
- A template for submission of the plans, along with detailed guidance on what should be included, will be provided to schools in the coming weeks.
- 24) Does that mean schools could have a longer than usual 1,080 hour or 180 instructional day academic year in 2020-21?**
- A. School districts already may exceed the 1,080 hour minimum requirement, for example, to build in flexibility for snow days. They may also choose to do that for additional time to learn.
- 25) In the meantime, what if a school district wants to make a change to its continuous learning plan?**
- A. Any district or accredited nonpublic school may combine Voluntary Educational Enrichment Opportunities and Required Educational Services for different grade levels in any way that best serves the needs of their students. Districts and nonpublic schools also are welcome to begin with Voluntary Educational Enrichment Opportunities and move to Required Educational Services later, or vice versa.

26) Should schools prepare for online/continuous learning in the fall?

- A. It's too early to predict what the fall will look like. But as we look to the future, we know we need robust, engaging options for learning outside of brick and mortar to be a permanent part of our educational framework. While face-to-face learning is highly valued, it's also important to help students be prepared for the increasingly digital world they live in.

27) What about students that were pursuing dual credit opportunities?

- A. Since dual credit courses are ultimately postsecondary courses and the postsecondary institution has decision-making authority regarding operation of the course, students who complete these courses will earn both high school and college credit. This is the case for students whose schools provide continuous learning opportunities through either the voluntary or required option, or a combination of the two.

Students should continue to participate in their dual credit courses, unless specific exemptions are established by the postsecondary institution.

28) Is there something that I can do, as a parent, to assist in my child's education?

- A. Yes! We have resources available by topic and age group, as well as a host of educational opportunities on the [Resources to Support Learning During COVID-19 webpage](#).