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Development
Research
Association**IDRA****Learning
Goes On****A COVID-19 Resource for Education**

April 17, 2020 Edition



Across the country, elementary, secondary and postsecondary schools have closed as part of the effort to slow the spread of COVID-19. Each week, IDRA issues an update on the impact of COVID-19-related policies on schools, students and families.

More resources and trainings for teachers, school administrators,

families and communities are on our [Learning Goes On website](#). See [Spanish version](#) of this edition.

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Community Voices

What We are Hearing from Families

The experiences and needs of students and families help shape IDRA's policy and educational practice work. We strive to support the local educational reform efforts of communities and ensure their perspectives are centered in policymaking at every level. Below is a sample of what we are hearing from families whose lives have been impacted, and up-ended, by COVID-19 and school closures.

"My high school daughter is doing well and gets some responses from the teachers. At the beginning of this work-at-home period, one teacher did talk to my daughter and helped her out. My little one is very frustrated because, even though we have a laptop, our WiFi connection is weak. My child asks me questions about his work, and I have to call my English-speaking friends to help us over the phone."

- Parent of a Texas fourth grader and 10th grader (translated)

"I'm very angry because the principal won't answer my messages. My children are getting very low grades and are very unhappy. I can't help them with their work and the teachers rarely respond to a text request. No teacher or administrator has called me on the phone. I need real communication where I can talk with a person in school. All I get is a few texts in Spanish. I'm concerned that they are giving grades on the homework, and this will count against my children."

- Parent of English learners in South Texas (translated)

"My children are doing well because the teacher calls every day. She talks to me and to them. The children are keeping up with the lessons. We also go to the ARISE [community] center to pick up the school meals every day."

- Parent in South Texas

"None of the teachers have called me on the phone, and I really need some real communication. We picked up the packets with all the assignments. My child completes them. Then we go to the grocery store to convert them into files to be sent to the Dojo class. We all need more communication and support from the school."

- Parent in Houston

"Several Latino families in the Dallas area are very concerned about the college entrance exams. Their children were informed that the tests would be conducted online. They don't know if they will be able to enter college in the fall."

- Family Advocate in Dallas

"I heard there are buses going around and parking in certain neighborhoods to provide WiFi connection. The students can go on board and work on computers, but I'm not going to let my kids go there. It's too dangerous with the virus."

Policy Update

Update: The CARES Act and Federal COVID-19 Actions

IDRA is tracking and analyzing the newest COVID-19-related education policies from federal and state governments across the South. Below are recent announcements from the U.S. Department of Education.

Immediate Release of Higher Education Funding

The U.S. Department of Education [announced](#) the immediate distribution of a portion of the \$14 billion Higher Education Emergency Relief Fund (part of the CARES Act). The department released \$6.28 billion for colleges to provide cash grants to students to cover expenses incurred due to COVID-19-related disruptions to their education, including course materials, technology, food, housing, healthcare and childcare.

Waivers of Federal Law

U.S. Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos offered waivers of federal testing requirements soon after school closures began in March. Since then, every state has applied for and been granted testing waivers. Following the passage of the CARES Act, the federal stimulus package in response to the COVID-19 crisis, Secretary DeVos announced a similar "streamlined process" to allow states to request waivers of other federal education requirements.

The U.S. Department of Education released a [two-page application template](#) with checkboxes for states to submit waiver requests. States must also check boxes to assure compliance with other applicable federal laws, the provision of notice and comment periods, and efforts to mitigate any negative effects of the requested waivers. The application does not require any additional information or a description of how the state will protect students and programs impacted by the waived requirements.

Specifically, the Department of Education [invited states to request waivers](#) in the following areas.

* The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) limits how often local education agencies (such as school districts) can get approval to carry over a portion of unused Title I funds from one year to the next. With a waiver, state education agencies can approve requests to carry over more than 15% of unused Title I funds to the following year's budget, even if the local education agency has been granted such approval within the past three years.

* The General Education Provisions Act (GEPA) allows a one-year extension for allocation and use of the previous year's federal funds for certain programs, including for improving basic education programs in schools with high numbers of students from families with low incomes and for serving migratory children, English learners and students experiencing homelessness. With a waiver, state and local education agencies can use federal funds awarded in 2018 for certain programs until September 30, 2021, without penalty. That includes programs for improving basic education initiatives in schools with high numbers of

students from families with low incomes and for educating migratory children and English learners.

* The Student Support and Academic Enrichment Program (SSAE) in Title IV of the ESSA requires needs assessments for local education agencies that receive funds; creates minimum spending requirements for programs that ensure all students have access to safe, healthy schools and well-rounded learning opportunities; and expands technology and digital literacy programs and infrastructure. With a waiver, local education agencies will no longer have to dedicate specific portions of funds to each program goal and can instead use those funds for other purposes within the SSAE.

* Title IV of the ESSA limits local education agency spending on technology infrastructure. With a waiver, agencies will no longer have a cap on these funds.

* To increase effectiveness, ESSA defines *professional development* as sustained, collaborative, intensive, data-driven training. With a waiver, educators will be able to engage in one-time professional development opportunities.

Guidance and Application for the Governor's Emergency Education Relief Fund

The U.S. Department of Education released guidance and an application for the nearly \$3 billion Governor's Emergency Education Relief (GEER) fund. The GEER fund is one of the three large funds that make up the majority of education spending in the CARES Act. Governors can use the funds their states receive to support schools, including charter and private schools, and communities most impacted by COVID-19, as determined by their state education agency. ([Get more details.](#))

Policy Recommendations

- The U.S. Department of Education should develop application processes and requirements for funds and waivers that are responsive to the rapidly-changing needs of schools and states but that also require information about how educational entities will ensure the equitable use of funds and application of waivers. Before receiving funds or waivers, these entities should explain how they will protect and target resources for the students most likely to experience educational difficulties during this time, including students of color, students from families with limited incomes, English learners, students with disabilities, students experiencing homelessness, and others.
- State and local education agencies and any other recipients of federal funds should comply with basic monitoring, accountability and transparency requirements to ensure monies are spent effectively and on the students who most need them. State agencies should provide guidance and tools to aid with these requirements and should regularly publish information about distribution and use of funds.
- Even as policymakers make necessary procedural changes to respond to the COVID-19 crisis, they must protect the funds that have been dedicated to specific programs and student populations and the rules that govern the distribution, use and monitoring of those funds.
- Charters and non-public schools that receive emergency and other program funds must be subject to accountability and transparency measures and all other rules governing the use of funds. In addition to directing emergency fund recipients to support charters and non-public schools, the Department of Education also [recently](#)

released \$65 million through the federal Charter School Program for creation and expansion of more than 100 charter schools. Nearly half of the funds - \$31.6 million - will be distributed to three Texas Charter Management Organizations. Additionally, it is now more important than ever to ensure that other funds are not diverted away from traditional public schools that are struggling to support their students and will **likely face future revenue losses** due to the economic impacts of the pandemic.

- Future COVID-19 federal legislation should increase program funding and emergency grants targeted for the students and families most impacted by the long-standing educational inequities exacerbated by the pandemic. Agencies, districts and schools should be required to develop robust engagement plans to regularly communicate with these students and families to assess needs and identify the most effective policies and practices.

**For more information and policy news, see
IDRA's Learning Goes On web hub.**

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Equitable Practices for Online Learning

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Register for Our Next Three Webinars on

English Language Arts and Reading

Featuring

Dr. Nilka Avilés, IDRA, with Abydos trainers:

Gerald Sharp, M.A., Edgewood ISD retired teacher and IDRA consultant

Jeanne Cantu, M.A., Texas A&M University-San Antonio adjunct faculty and IDRA consultant

Journal Writing About the Present for the Future - ELAR Webinar Part 1

Wednesday, April 22, 2020, at 2:00 PM (cdt)

Lead your students as they create a primary source for future historians. In Part 1 of this three-part webinar series, Abydos trainers will outline literacy lessons adaptable for all grades as students use journal writing to record their responses to a pandemic that has upended their school year.

REGISTER NOW

From Journaling to Personal Narratives - ELAR Webinar Part 2

Wednesday, April 29, 2020, at 2:00 PM (cdt)

In the second of this three-part webinar series, Abydos trainers will demonstrate a process where students select one of their journal entries to expand it into a fully developed personal narrative, reflecting the significance of the COVID-19 event.

REGISTER NOW

From Journaling and Personal Narratives to Letter Writing - ELAR Webinar Part 3

Thursday, April 30, 2020, at 2:00 PM (cdt)

In the final installment of this three-part webinar series, Abydos trainers will present steps for students to select from their journal entries one issue important to them. Students will expand their writing into a letter to someone in authority suggesting how the issue and its outcome could have been improved upon.

REGISTER NOW

Virtual VOE

Free Webinars on Education for Immigrant Families

IDRA and the Consulate General of Mexico in San Antonio have been partnering to help Mexican and Mexican American families navigate the U.S. education system and learn about important educational opportunities in both countries.

But since the consulate is closed due to the COVID-19 crisis, IDRA's Ventanilla de Orientación Educativa (VOE) in San Antonio is launching a portal with bilingual materials and videos for families.

Topics available now:

- * **Rights of Immigrant Students (PreK-12)**
- * **Navigating the U.S. K-12 Education System**

Topics coming soon:

- * College Financial Aid Opportunities for Immigrant Students
- * Adult & Community Education Opportunities in Spanish
- * Educational Opportunities in Mexico for Nationals Living in Both Countries



[Watch VOE Videos](#)

[Learn more about the IDRA VOE](#)

News Dashboard

IDRA's COVID-19 Education News Dashboard

IDRA released a dashboard with news and social media streams related to COVID-19 and education along with key resources.



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The Intercultural Development Research Association is an independent private non-profit organization dedicated to ensuring educational opportunity for every child. IDRA strengthens and transforms public education by providing dynamic training; useful research, evaluation, and frameworks for action; timely policy analyses; and innovative materials and programs.

IDRA works hand-in-hand with hundreds of thousands of educators and families each year in communities and classrooms around the country. All our work rests on an unwavering commitment to creating self-renewing schools that value and promote the success of students of all backgrounds.