

Distance Education**Distance Learning Plan Due to Necessary School Closure**

This policy outlines North Canaan Elementary School's (NCES) plan to provide distance learning options in the event that the school must be closed for any reason. This action plan allows NCES (the District) to operate remotely while continuing to provide meaningful instruction to students through the use of a variety of instructional resources.

The Board of Education (Board) seeks to ensure fluid operation during a time when classes must be cancelled for any reason, as well as provide equitable access for all students. A distance learning day is a remote school day where students and staff have an opportunity to explore and engage in meaningful learning experiences that are (a) aligned to the curriculum, (b) connected to standards, and (c) relevant to the current instructional sequence. While nothing replaces the genuine human interactions that happen authentically in the classroom between students and teachers, distance learning will support continuity of instruction in the event of a closure.

Distance learning school days will run as detailed in the section below entitled "Scheduling." The schedule will allow teaching staff adequate time to present the learning experience to support students as they (a) access information, (b) prioritize their day, and (c) communicate with their teacher(s). Teachers will be available during the hours listed below.

Goals of the Distance Learning Program

The Board, by its adoption of this policy, establishes the following goals for the distance learning program:

1. To ensure the continuity of instruction if and when a situation negatively impacts NCES's ability to maintain daily operations.
2. To continue to provide students with an authentic, meaningful, and comprehensive school experience.
3. In some situations, to mitigate or completely eliminate possible exposure to a public health crisis among students, parents, guardians, employees, and community members.
4. To ensure compliance with all federal and state statutes and regulations, and with Board policies and administrative regulations, as may be amended by state and federal authorities.

Definitions

Synchronous learning experiences are when classes occur on set schedules and time frames. Students and instructors are online at the same time in synchronous classes since lectures, discussions, and presentations take place at specific hours. When blended or remote, all students must be online at that exact time in order to participate in the class.

Asynchronous learning experiences let students complete their work assigned on their own time. Students are given a time frame during which they need to connect to their class daily or as determined by the teacher. When asynchronous, students can access assignments and content at any time of the day (or night).

Key Components of the Distance Learning Program

The Board, by its adoption of this policy, establishes the following key components for the distance learning program:

- 1. Equitable Access:** To provide equitable instruction, the District will ensure that all students have access to instructional materials and electronic devices.
 - A. The District will ensure that all students have access to a device for distance learning. Data about access to the Internet and the availability of digital devices for student use at home are to be collected by the District. In the event that a student does not have access to WiFi at home, the District will make its best effort to provide internet access for student use.
 - B. Information provided on the District website shall be available in a number of language choices.
- 2. Communication:** The Superintendent will send notice of a school closure and change to distance learning to parents/guardians using the Region's emergency notification/communication system. Detailed instructions with regard to building access to pick up necessary materials and other important information will be posted on the school's website as well as via social media.
- 3. Attendance:** The Board directs the Superintendent or his/her designee to develop a plan to verify and track student attendance as related to the provided distance learning activities. Parents/guardians must report the days their child(ren) are unable to participate in the provided distance learning activities due to illness or other specified reason. A means of reporting absences must be made available to parents/guardians. In addition, when required, the District will treat a student's attendance record for the year in conformity with any "Attendance Guidance" provided by the Commissioner of Education and the Connecticut State Department of Education.
- 4. Harassment, Intimidation, and Bullying**

During distance learning days, the District will adhere to all aspects of our Harassment Intimidation and Bullying policies and procedures.

5. Time Schedules

Teachers will be available during the posted hours of school operation in accordance with the North Canaan Faculty Association Contract. The time schedules may be altered to reflect bargaining unit agreements between the Board and staff and any memoranda of understanding entered into as a result of the emergency situation. Specific times will be communicated to parents and posted on the school and district websites.

6. School Nutrition Benefits

Any student who receives free and reduced school lunch shall be afforded the opportunity to obtain a nutritional school lunch prepared by the food service provider/department as practicable. The schedule for availability and/or locations of pickup shall be posted on the District and school websites and shared through the District's emergency notification system.

7. Curriculum

Distance learning will support continuity of instruction in the event of a closure, but, activities and assessments may take longer in this mode than they might during a regular in-person school day. As such, modifications to the curriculum may be required in the event of a sustained closure. Therefore, all curricular areas will have identified priority standards on which they will focus during the period of closure. These priority standards should be determined such that a student who demonstrates proficiency on those standards will be prepared to successfully begin the next course in a sequence requiring minimal remediation.

Social-emotional learning activities, embedded in the curriculum, will be a vital part of the distance-learning model implemented by teachers in Region One.

8. Resources to Support Instruction

The District shall utilize varied resources to support student learning. These include, but are not limited to, the following:

- A. The posting on the school's website a web page devoted to relevant online resources and digital subscriptions.
- B. Teacher utilization of a common learning management system and digital tools.

9. Instruction: Student Responsibilities

- A. Students/families are expected to log into the learning management system to identify the expected work for the day and may be asked to collaborate virtually with other classmates on assignments. Students without a school-approved excuse will be held responsible for all work not completed by the assigned deadline. Deadlines will be assigned at the discretion of the classroom teacher and assignments will be returned either graded or with feedback in a timely manner.

- B. Students who have questions about a lesson or assignment will contact the teacher using the school-approved tools to ask for additional guidance.
- C. Students will be present for synchronous learning experiences with their classmates and teacher(s).
- D. Students will apply curriculum-based social-emotional learning strategies in the context of distance learning, connecting with staff and peers for support as needed.
- E. Students will review and respond to teacher-provided feedback as well as monitor grades in the student information system (i.e. PowerSchool) on a weekly basis as appropriate.

10. Special Education

- A. The District will provide distance learning options to address the provision of appropriate special education and related services for identified students with disabilities. Programs and services shall be provided to students ages three through 21 in concert with the requirements of federal and state law; such requirements may be amended by governmental action with modifications that may be unavoidable due to any health crisis. It is recognized that the District may not be able to provide all services in the same manner as they are typically provided.
- B. Students will continue to receive provisions of their Individualized Education Plan (IEP) requirements and will be provided with a free and appropriate program (FAPE) encompassing special education and related services to the greatest extent possible under the circumstances. What is appropriate and reasonable will include the individual child's circumstances as well as the circumstances related to a pandemic/epidemic emergency.
- C. Appropriately certified professional staff members will continue to implement these programs through distance learning opportunities. All special education programming will be consistent with the student's IEP to the extent appropriate.
- D. All disabled students with an in-class resource center program documented in the IEP will be provided with modifications to meet their needs based on the distance learning options afforded to their general education counterparts.
- E. All students with pull-out replacement center programs documented in the IEP will be provided with appropriate materials and instruction by their special education teachers to meet their needs based on the distance learning options appropriate to their IEPs and learning abilities.

- F. All students with self-contained programs documented in the IEP will be provided with appropriate materials and instruction by their special education teachers to meet their needs based on the distance learning options appropriate to their IEPs and learning abilities.
- G. The Board acknowledges that classroom and one-to-one instructional aides may not be available to support a student during a health-related closure.
- H. Related Services (Counseling, Speech-Language, Physical Therapy, Occupational Therapy): Counseling, Speech, Physical and Occupational Therapy activities will be provided to students by therapist(s) via emailed activities and/or assigned on other remote platforms and web-based resources that have been individualized based on IEP goals. Additional activities will be scheduled and provided based on individualized needs.
- I. Speech language services and counseling services may be delivered to special education students through the use of electronic communication or a virtual or online platform, as appropriate.
- J. Out-of-District Programs: In the event that District schools are closed and private out-of-district schools remain open, students who are transported by a private company should attend school unless otherwise indicated by the out-of-district placement. In the event that the student is transported to the out-of-district placement by district transportation and the buses remain non-operational due to the closing, the parents will be asked to drive their child to the school and will be reimbursed for transportation according to Board policy for days the child is in attendance during the health-related closure.
- K. In the event that the District school is open and private out-of-district schools are closed, the District will collaborate with the out-of-district placement to offer appropriate meaningful learning activities for completion at home.
- L. Referrals and Evaluations: Traditional timelines will be adhered to via the Supervisor of Special Services and meetings will be held remotely. The District will make every effort to ensure that evaluations are completed within the statutory timelines. Timelines may be impacted due to extended school closures. *(Days that schools are closed are not counted as "school days" for the initial evaluation timeline. The timeline pauses during the school closure.)* Child Study Team members will contact parents if evaluations fall outside of the legally mandated timeframes.
- M. Annual Reviews and Reevaluations: These shall take place once District schools reopen. Parent/Guardians and adult students may agree in writing that a reevaluation is not necessary. IEPs that lapse during the school closure shall remain in effect until a new IEP is developed. When school personnel and parents/guardians agree that a PPT meeting is necessary during the

time of school closure, it shall be held via alternate means such as video conferencing or conference call.

- N. Due Process Hearings/Activities: The District will comply with and operate within any extension provided by the Commissioner of Education for all state statutory and regulatory time requirements related to special education due process activities.
- O. Communication: The District's special education staff shall provide information through a variety of methods, including family phone calls, emails, and video conferences. Also, at least one member of a child's team (special education teacher, speech therapist, psychologist) is to be in contact with the respective parent/guardian at least weekly (unless less frequent contacts have been requested).

11. Staff Responsibilities

The Board expects the teaching staff to plan for virtual instruction that balances synchronous and asynchronous learning experiences, to be available through email and online between the posted times; to read and respond to emails during noted hours, to adhere to all district policies as may be modified due to the nature and length of the closure, and to report any instances of students at risk, threats made, or any other meaningful information to District Administrators.

Paraprofessionals will receive instructions with regard to teaching support assignments from the appropriate Supervisor of Special Services and/or their building Principal and will work with their assigned teacher to deliver student instruction per the expectations of that teacher. Professional development modules via online programs will be made available in order to provide aides with ongoing educational opportunities.

District administrators will work from home to assist in the daily operation of all aspects of distance learning. In the event that the District is placed under general quarantine, administrative responsibilities will be determined by the Superintendent of Schools. Virtual planning meetings will be necessary.

12. Monitoring Student Engagement

The Board considers student engagement extremely important. It is important to ensure that all students are engaged and are connected to the resources they need. District and school administrators shall have regular connections with students and families. District and school staff shall check-in and confirm whether families have access to information and services, are safe and supported, and are prepared to support their child's learning through the District's continued learning efforts.

In order to monitor student engagement in continued learning, the Board expects the following actions to take place:

- A. Teachers and support staff are to connect with all students to maintain their relationships, assist

with issues related to assignments, and encourage full participation in the continued learning opportunities. Connections should be documented and tracked as appropriate.

- B. Student support staff shall identify students who were chronically absent prior to the school closure/cancellation of classes or otherwise identified as needing additional support to determine if such support can continue virtually. The option to refer a student exhibiting inadequate engagement to the District's team responsible for school attendance should be considered as necessary.
- C. School administrators and support staff are to reach out to students who are not signing into online learning or engaging in other continued learning opportunities. Families are to be contacted by school staff to ensure safety and well-being and connect students to the continued learning opportunities, technology, and social/emotional support they may require.

13. Grades

The grading and reporting systems to be used shall be developed by the administration and faculty and is subject to the approval of the Superintendent and/or Board of Education.

The Principal shall inform the Board of Education and discuss with them the grading and reporting systems as developed by the administration and teaching staff and upon the recommendation of the Superintendent of Schools.

Legal References:

- Connecticut General Statutes
- 10-221 Boards of education to prescribe rules.
- 18 U.S.C. §§2510-2522, Electronic Communication Privacy Act.
- P.L. No. 110-385, Protecting Children in the 21st Century Act.
- Plan for Reimagining Connecticut Classrooms for Continuous Learning

Adopted: October 13, 2020

NORTH CANAAN BOARD OF EDUCATION
North Canaan, Connecticut