

Interim Guidance for Remote Learning 2021-2022 School Year

April 27, 2021

The public health response to COVID-19 is continuously evolving, particularly given the opportunities for vaccination and the potential impact of virus variants. Therefore, the guidance herein could change, but is published because planning for next year is imperative. This guidance is also subject to change pending the outcomes of the 2021 legislative session, to the extent that such changes influence virtual and remote education.

DEFINITIONS

Remote Learning: means an educational opportunity provided at home or outside of a school building, typically using virtual learning (*location* where learning happens.)

Virtual Learning: means the provision of instruction by means of one or more internet-based software platforms as part of an in-person or remote learning model.

This guidance addresses the changes expected related to remote learning as we reimagine education for the 2021-2022 school year based upon the lessons learned from our collective experience during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Importance of In-Person Education

The Office of the Governor, the Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE), and the Connecticut State Department of Public Health (DPH), and [national experts](#), have reinforced throughout the pandemic that access to in-person learning opportunities is a priority, particularly due to the significance of the social-emotional environment provided through student and adult interactions during the school day. However, we know that it is critical to learn from the disruption caused by the pandemic to make forward movement to evolve the approach to PreK-12 education, rather than return “back” to what education was like before this worldwide crisis.

There is no current requirement under Connecticut or federal law that after the period of emergency this school year, school districts are mandated to provide all students voluntary daily access to remote learning at the unilateral request of the student/family. The requirement that school districts provide temporary remote learning opportunities for all parents and students provided in the Adapt, Advance, Achieve: Connecticut's Plan to Learn and Grow Together, and Addendum 1, Temporarily Opting into Voluntary Remote Learning Due to COVID-19 will no longer be in place after this school year.

At this time, DPH and CSDE do not anticipate the need to mandate, due to public health necessity, that all school districts provide an option for students and their families to opt-in to a voluntary remote option after this school year.

Use of Remote Learning as a Strategy

Connecticut will continue to be a leader in innovation when it comes to how our students learn and access school. While the interests of educational opportunity, social-emotional learning, access, and equity support the return to in-person learning, this guidance identifies the intent of the CSDE to provide additional support for school districts to employ remote and virtual learning *judiciously* going forward, as a dynamic educational option where it is supported by CSDE standards, current law, or anticipated legislative action.

The CSDE is actively working with stakeholders on this topic, taking into consideration its possible use for:

- pursuit of advanced placement options, higher-level or specialized classes, or technical education that may not be offered in a home district;
- use of virtual software or platforms in classrooms to expand teaching approaches and best utilize technology for in-person learning;

- support of learning acceleration (defined as a process of diagnosing unfinished learning and embedding it with grade level content);
- strengthening equity across the state by enhancing enrichment options and leveraging deliberate virtual access for students in concert with in-person learning, in line with the Connecticut State Board of Education strategic plan and other CSDE equity-driven initiatives;
- potential need for a classroom quarantine; and
- emergency building-related issues such as an issue with heating, plumbing, or inclement weather (short periods/limited).

Conversations with stakeholders also include discussion about limitations on the use of remote learning, such as consideration of concerns raised about requiring educators to provide instruction simultaneously to in-person and remote student groups, as well as consideration of the importance of student social interaction and exposure to diverse individuals and settings.

The CSDE is currently working to draft standards¹ for long-term changes to engage remote and virtual learning by:

- reviewing and compiling the existing guidance on this topic provided by the CSDE, such as [Addendum 12: Reimagining CT Classrooms: Planning the Instructional Time for Remote Learning in Hybrid and Full Remote Models](#);
- surveying states regionally and nationwide;
- engaging family, community, and stakeholder input;
- considering the experiences during 2020 and 2021 by staff, families and students; and
- assessing the necessary resources/funding.

These standards will also be informed by our State Board of Education’s COVID-19 remote learning [resolution](#) that:

Districts should implement an instructional framework with equity at its core. . . [and provide] rigorous learning and engagement opportunities that are aligned with State standards and Board expectations . . . These should include, but are not limited to, opportunities for students to be engaged on a daily basis . . . to access grade level standards. . . necessary academic and social-emotional supports. . . [as well as] on-grade instruction that accelerates learning and incorporates the requisite scaffolds and supports. . . .

Rapidly shifting to entirely remote learning or a hybrid model was mandated during the emergency because it was a required public health response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The educational community has made immense progress and shown great resilience when implementing this emergency departure from the traditional approach to education.

Nonetheless, it remains broadly accepted that in-person access to school is the best long-term approach for most students to be educated, have equitable and effective access to educational opportunities, find necessary supports from adults and proper nutrition, as well as to engage in age-appropriate and necessary social and emotional growth. Therefore, additional guidance will be forthcoming to address the necessary balance, and it will be informed by the outcome of the legislative session. Currently, school districts already have the option to give credit for online instruction as set forth in Conn. Gen. Stat. § 10-221a (g). At this time, there are also legislative initiatives that support the permissive use of remote learning by school districts more broadly (for example, [Senate Bill 2, An Act Concerning Social Equity and the Health, Safety, and Education of Children](#)) being watched closely by the CSDE.

To participate in providing input on these topics, please contact Jessa Mirtle, Legal Director, at Jessa.Mirtle@ct.gov.

¹ Our school communities are reminded that any standards, and this guidance, do not change any of the school districts’ existing legal obligations to provide accommodations on an individualized basis, which may include the use of remote education options. This also has no impact on requirements to provide homebound and hospitalized instruction to special education students who are unable to attend school due to a verified medical reason. Homebound and hospitalized instruction, pursuant to state law, should not be confused with instruction in the home, which is an articulated placement on the continuum of educational placements outlined in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Such placement would occur as the result of a PPT recommendation that instruction in the home provides the student with FAPE in the least restrictive environment and would be reflected in the student’s IEP.