

**Guidance for Continuous Education**

**July 2020**

**Introduction**

As the [State of Maine begins to reopen](https://www.maine.gov/covid19/), we look ahead to a school year that will be unlike any we have experienced before. Schools may offer a variety of in-person and distance learning options to students and families while ensuring that the [educational experience for all students](https://www.maine.gov/doe/covid-19/reintegrate) is consistent across different settings and transitions between them are as seamless as possible.

Early [analysis](https://www.nwea.org/research/publication/the-covid-19-slide-what-summer-learning-loss-can-tell-us-about-the-potential-impact-of-school-closures-on-student-academic-achievement/) of the impact of COVID-19 school facility closures suggests there could be significant learning loss for students in both math and reading as we begin the 2020-21 school year. We are also concerned that existing gaps in outcomes among students could be exacerbated.

The following recommendations are intended to provide [Maine Charter Schools](https://www.maine.gov/csc/schools) with guidelines for continuous education; this document is not intended as a checklist to be reported back to the Commission.

While the guides acknowledge certain legal obligations, they extend beyond that to offer a target for excellence rather than compliance.

Schools are reminded to stay up to date with health requirements and information from the [Maine Center for Disease Control](https://www.maine.gov/dhhs/mecdc/) and the [Maine Department of Education](https://www.maine.gov/doe/home).

As we prepare for the 2020-21 school year, we must ensure that all students have access to a safe and supportive learning environment that delivers rigorous and [standards-aligned](https://www.maine.gov/doe/learning/diplomas/MaineLearningResults) content that prepares our students to succeed in school and life. An essential part of this planning is setting a clear and high bar for what constitutes a quality, “continuous education” for all students.

**What is Continuous Education?**

Continuous education takes place when both instruction and learning occur seamlessly across different learning environments, including in-person and remote settings. It requires the development of a coherent and thoughtful plan to ensure that students experience the equivalent levels of rigor and quality, whether engaged in full-time distance learning, full-time in-person learning, or a hybrid or blended approach, alternating between remote and in-person environments. Continuous education may also include periods of emergency when distance learning may be required for all students.

**The Three Pillars of Continuous Education**

• **High Expectations:** Schools should maintain high expectations for all students and establish a coherent academic foundation for their continuous education plan that upholds existing academic standards while ensuring continuous use of rigorous curricula and ongoing assessment of student progress.

• **Equity and Access**: Schools should address the social, emotional and mental health needs of all students and meet the unique needs of diverse learners with a focus on students with disabilities and English learners (ELs). Schools should ensure access to needed technology to enable full participation in continuous education.

• **Family Engagement**: Schools should treat families as critical partners in continuous education, providing them with ample opportunities to inform decision-making and establishing clear and accessible lines of two-way communication.

This document is organized by pillar, guide and indicator.

• **Pillar**: The three pillars capture the most critical areas of focus for schools in preparing for continuous education: High Expectations, Equity and Access, Family Engagement.

• **Guide**: Each pillar encompasses two to four guides. The guides collectively set a vision for excellence in the context of continuous education.

• **Indicators**: Each guide is further subdivided into indicators that help describe what each guide looks like when implemented effectively.

**Pillar One: High Expectations**

**1.A: Academic Standards**

*Expectations for all students should remain high and consistent regardless of their learning environment.*

• Schools should ground instruction in all [Maine’s Learning Results and Maine’s Guiding Principles](https://www.maine.gov/doe/learning/diplomas/MaineLearningResults) across grades K-12.

• Schools should use rigorous, standards-aligned curricula across all learning environments that are consistent with their educational philosophy, mission and vision.

• Schools should assess student performance on the previous year’s standards at the start of the school year with validated, formative assessments and use these results to inform planning and instruction, particularly for those students with the most significant learning gaps.

• Schools should ensure that robust systems of evidence-based, academic intervention and support take place across all learning environments, with a focus on helping accelerate the learning of students with the most significant learning gaps.

• Schools should maintain policies for credit attainment, proficiency standards, and graduation requirements while ensuring that high school students continue their paths to graduation and a successful post-secondary transition.

**1.B: Delivery of Instruction**

*The methods for delivering instruction across all learning environments, including both in-person and remote settings, should be user-friendly, coherent and consistent.*

• Schools should plan for and document the core components of their continuous education plan, describing how the school will deliver instruction in a user-friendly, coherent and consistent manner across all learning environments, and how the school is prepared to transition seamlessly across learning environments as the public health situation evolves. This plan should address at a minimum:

1. The learning environment options available to students (i.e., in-person, remote, hybrid).

2. The medium(s) in which instruction is delivered to students in remote settings.

3. The way any resources - technology, instructional platforms, books, supplies - are delivered to students or families.

4. The expected hours per day for synchronous learning (i.e., learning that happens in real-time with the student and teacher together) versus asynchronous learning (i.e., independent learning that takes place without real-time input from the teacher).

5. The staffing model and master schedule used to deliver instruction and interventions.

6. The training and professional development for staff to support the effective implementation of the plan.

7. The way accommodations are provided consistent with applicable laws pertaining to students with disabilities and English learners.

8. The way accommodations are provided to students who are seriously deficient in academic growth and proficiency.

9. The way student work is collected, recorded and evaluated.

10. Tracking and record-keeping methods for attendance.

11. The approach for evaluating the continuous education plan and its implementation as well as using this feedback to drive continuous improvement.

• The continuous education plan, including the balance between synchronous and asynchronous learning, should be consistent with the school’s educational philosophy, mission and vision and informed by the availability of technology among students, reasonable expectations for family involvement, age appropriateness, and feedback from families.

**1.C: Feedback on Student Work**

*Students and families should have a clear understanding of student progress toward defined learning objectives.*

• Schools should assess student work that is completed across all learning environments not only for completion but also for how well the student has mastered defined learning objectives.

• Schools should provide regular written feedback on student work to students and families with timing that is consistent across all learning environments.

• Schools should provide students and families with regular updates on overall student performance and progress.

**1.D: Student Attendance**

*Attendance should, at minimum, be tracked daily for all students.*

• Schools should have at least one touchpoint daily with every student.

• Schools should track and record student attendance daily as per state requirements.

• Schools may also have other methods for documenting period-based attendance or student engagement and should communicate those expectations to families and caregivers.

**Pillar Two: Equity and Access**

**2.A: Whole Student Supports**

*Addressing the needs of the whole student is essential for effective learning and remains an important function of schools, now more than ever.*

• Schools should ensure continuous access to [nutritious food](https://www.maine.gov/doe/schools/nutrition) for all qualifying students regardless of their learning environment (e.g., in school, at home, etc.)

• Schools should build positive school climates and provide [trauma-informed, social-emotional supports](https://www.maine.gov/doe/schools/safeschools/counseling) across remote and in-person learning environments for both students and staff to foster connection and belonging across every school community.

• Schools should continue to identify, refer and monitor students with mental health and other non-academic support needs across all learning environments.

• Schools should review and update their student support policies as needed, including those pertaining to [suicide awareness and prevention](https://www.maine.gov/doe/suicideprevention), sexual harassment[, prevention of sexual abuse](https://www.childrenssafetypartnership.org/) by school staff, [discipline](https://www.maine.gov/doe/schools/safeschools/studentbehavior), [antibullying](https://www.maine.gov/doe/schools/safeschools/bullying), and [mandated reporter requirements](https://www.maine.gov/dhhs/ocfs/mandated-reporters.shtml) to ensure applicability across all learning environments. These policies should be publicly available, easily searchable, and in a user-friendly format.

• Schools should maintain a close working relationship with and seek advice from both the [School Nurse and the School Health Advisor.](https://www.maine.gov/doe/schools/safeschools/healthed/nurseresources)

**2.B: Students with Disabilities**

*Students with disabilities retain all rights consistent with the law and should have their unique instructional and related-service needs met.*

• Within the first two weeks of the school year, [schools should plan for and communicate to families about how they will shift resources, policies and practices to ensure continuity across remote and in-person learning environments in referring, evaluating, identifying and supporting students with disabilities while complying with Individuals with Disabilities Education Act](https://www.maine.gov/doe/learning/specialed/director) ([IDEA](https://sites.ed.gov/idea/statuteregulations/)) and [MUSER](https://www.maine.gov/doe/cds/muser) (Maine Unified Special Education Regulation).

• Schools should partner with each student’s family and use data to develop or amend and execute [individualized education programs](https://www.maine.gov/doe/learning/specialed) (IEPs), as appropriate, considering how each student’s needs for instructional and related services will be addressed in both remote and in-person learning environments as well as the family’s need for training to support their student.

• Schools should investigate and implement all possible flexibilities in related-service delivery, such as telehealth and other options.

**2.C: English Learners**

*English learners (ELs) retain all rights consistent with the law and should have their unique instructional and language needs met.*

• Within the first two weeks of the school year, schools should plan for and communicate to families about how they will shift their resources, policies and practices to [identify and support ELs](https://www.maine.gov/doe/learning/englishlearners) across remote and in-person learning environments while complying with [federal civil rights and education law](https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/letters/colleague-el-201501.pdf) and state policies.

• Schools should prepare to identify ELs in a timely manner, including re-screening all students who were screened provisionally while in a remote learning environment using state-approved English proficiency screeners as soon as possible once the student is able to attend school in person.

• Schools should implement their EL program plans with fidelity across both remote and in-person learning environments to advance the linguistic and academic goals of ELs and have a system in place that draws upon multiple data sources to evaluate and refine their EL program.

• Schools should communicate with families in a language they understand, to the extent practicable, in compliance with [Civil Rights Law](https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/dcl-factsheet-lep-parents-201501.pdf).

**2.D: Access to Technology**

*All students should have appropriate, secure and adequate access to the* [*technology*](https://www.maine.gov/doe/learning/ltt) *needed to participate fully in continuous education.*

• Schools should take steps to determine the nature and extent of device and internet access among their student body.

• Schools should expand access to appropriate and necessary devices as well as internet service required to enable continuous education for all students, particularly for those who are [homeless](https://www.maine.gov/doe/schools/safeschools/counseling/highmobility/homelessed) or in [foster care](https://www.maine.gov/doe/schools/safeschools/fostercare).

• Schools should put in place a technology security plan to help ensure the appropriate and responsible use of devices.

• Schools should provide adequate, timely and appropriate technical support to students and staff.

• Schools should uphold all relevant laws and regulations concerning [student privacy and data security](https://www.maine.gov/doe/data-reporting/privacy) in the use of this technology.

**Pillar Three: Family Engagement**

**3.A: Family Partnerships**

*Families should be engaged as critical partners.*

• Schools should [engage families](https://www.maine.gov/doe/familyengagement) early and often in developing and refining their continuous education plans using multiple and diverse methods of engagement; they should also demonstrate how they are responding and making changes based on family feedback.

• Schools should provide families with clear expectations for how the continuous education plan will be implemented and the role that families can play in supporting their students’ learning.

• Schools should provide trainings and/or resources to support families with facilitating learning at home, consistent with the expectations for family involvement in their continuous education plan.

• Schools should consider any new technology that families will be required to use in the development of their continuous education plan and provide appropriate training to families.

• Schools should train staff on [culturally responsive](https://www.maine.gov/doe/familyengagement) teaching and family engagement to cultivate effective partnerships with students and families.

**3.B: Family Communication**

*Communications to families should be proactive, accessible, and two-way.*

• Schools should develop an accessible, family-facing description of their continuous education plan that is available on their website and distributed directly to families and students as early as possible in the school year.

• Schools should share with families the results of the formative assessments for their student(s) and provide information about academic interventions and supports as well as how they can be requested.

• Schools should develop and implement a continuous education communications plan that includes multiple modes of frequent and proactive outreach. The plan should also incorporate opportunities for feedback to support continuous improvement.

• Schools should [translate](https://www.maine.gov/doe/sites/maine.gov.doe/files/inline-files/Translation%20and%20Interpretation%20Guidelines%20for%20Title%20I%20and%20Title%20III.pdf) family-facing documents into the major languages spoken by their families and make available interpretation services for in-person and virtual meetings with families, to the extent practicable.

• Schools should make available on their website in an accessible and easily searched format contact information for key points of contact, including technical support, school administrators, special education staff, teaching staff and methods for requesting additional academic support (e.g., office hours, email, etc.).

For COVID-19 resources and additional information, visit the [Maine Department of Education’s website](https://www.maine.gov/doe/covid-19/) .

The Maine Charter School Commission thanks the following for their assistance and contributions:

[D.C. Public Charter School Board](https://dcpcsb.org/); April Perkins, Director of ESOL/Bilingual Programs & Title III, ME Dept. of Education; Dr. Roberta Lucas, Federal Program Coordinator Special Services, ME Dept. of Education; Walter Beesley, Child Nutrition Director, ME Dept. of Education; and Dr. Joseph Mattos, Consultant.