



Return-to-Learn Guidance

Purpose

Return-to-Learn plans are required to be submitted to the Iowa Department of Education (Department) by July 1, 2020. These plans are designed to help districts and nonpublic schools meet the challenges of 2020-21 by:

- Ensuring that remote learning options are available for all students;
- Planning to help students catch-up for the learning they may have missed during school closures;
- Integrating public health strategies into Iowa's schools;
- Enabling schools to move between on-site and remote learning as needed; and
- Helping the Department and our partners at Iowa's area education agencies (AEAs) understand how best to support schools.

All districts and nonpublic schools must submit a Return-to-Learn Plan through the Department's Consolidated Accountability and Support Application (CASA). The steps to creating your Return-to-Learn plan are described in the following section.

Creating the Return-to-Learn Plan

Iowa schools will potentially reopen in stages rather than all at once in the fall as they have in previous years. These steps are essential to create a Return-to-Learn Plan that honors the stages of reopening that schools may experience.

School Calendar

A school district or accredited nonpublic school may begin its school calendar before August 23, 2020, but only if the school district adopts a calendar as a part of its Return-to-Learn Plan submitted to the Department. The plan submitted must ensure that any instructional time scheduled before August 23, 2020 is in excess of the minimum instructional time of 180 days or 1,080 hours. There are a few ways districts can add time onto the 2020-21 calendar:

- Districts may choose to move days or hours of instructional time from those remaining in the 2019-20 school calendar to their 2020-21 calendar. This is subject to local contract negotiations.
- Districts may choose to fund additional days of instruction prior to August 23, 2020. These additional days can be added via Continuous Learning or a Hybrid model to reduce costs if either model fits local needs.

Steps

STEP 1: PLAN FOR REQUIRED CONTINUOUS LEARNING

All districts and accredited nonpublic schools must have a plan for offering Continuous Learning and requiring the participation of students as schools reopen for the 2020-21 school year. This learning plan can be used in an emergency, such as the resurgence of COVID-19, or under another circumstance in which it is not possible for students to be in the building receiving instruction. Required Continuous Learning plans will be submitted as part of the Return-to-Learn plans due July 1, 2020 and are the only portion that must be approved by the Department. To facilitate creation of these plans, districts and schools must use the [Continuous Learning Template](#).

STEP 2: PLAN FOR HYBRID LEARNING

All districts and accredited nonpublic schools may choose to offer educational services through a hybrid model of Continuous Learning and On-Site Learning for at least some portion of the 2020-21 school year. This means services are offered both remotely and at physical school locations. The Hybrid model may allow for social distancing while partially reopening school buildings to provide educational services. Plans involving Hybrid models will be submitted as part of the Return-to-Learn Plan but will not be approved or denied. Districts and schools planning for the Hybrid model are encouraged to use the [Return-to-Learn Support Document](#).

STEP 3: PLAN FOR ON-SITE DELIVERY

All districts and accredited nonpublic schools may also choose to move to on-site provision of educational services as part of their Return-to-Learn Plan, as long as it is deemed safe by public health officials and the school has actively planned for appropriate health and safety measures. Plans involving On-Site models will be submitted as part of the Return-to-Learn Plan but will not be approved or denied. Districts and schools planning to offer all educational service on-site are encouraged to use the [Return-to-Learn Support Document](#).

STEP 4: SUBMIT YOUR RETURN-TO-LEARN PLAN

Return-to-Learn plans are due in CASA no later than July 1, 2020. Applications for Required Continuous Learning are part of Return-to-Learn Plans for all district and nonpublic schools, regardless of prior approval during spring school closure. For the Hybrid and On-Site portions of the plans, submissions will be marked "received" by the Department but not approved or denied.

State Support

The Department, along with AEAs and other education organizations, will be creating and releasing support and professional learning to ensure that all Iowa schools can meet the demands of the Return-to-Learn plans for the 2020-21 school year. These include:

- Professional development to support the use of the [Return-to-Learn Support Document](#);
- Provision of a statewide platform for online learning that all Iowa districts may use if they wish; and
- Professional learning on the support of students with special needs in a Continuous Learning environment, particularly students with disabilities.

We will continue to reach out to the education community to ensure that we are meeting the needs of all Iowa schools at this time.

Return-to-Learn Steps

This table provides a summary of the steps to take to create your Return-to-Learn Plan and how they are applied.

Question	Step 1: Required Continuous Learning	Step 2: Hybrid Learning Plan	Step 3: On-Site Delivery Plan
Who may/must provide this?	All districts and nonpublic schools <u>must</u> have a plan to provide this.	All districts and nonpublic schools <u>may</u> have a plan to provide this.	All districts and nonpublic schools <u>may</u> have a plan to provide this.
What is this delivery model?	Required Continuous Learning ensures that academic work is equivalent in effort and rigor to typical classroom work. All students are required to participate, attendance is taken, work is graded, and credit is granted. Typically, instruction is provided through some type of online learning.	This model is a combination of Required Continuous Learning and On-Site Learning Delivery. The methods may be combined by offering some student groups services on-site at different times or choosing which student groups get each delivery method by matching need.	This model provides educational services on-site in traditional brick and mortar settings.
What methods can we use?	This model may include online education, home delivery or pick-up of educational resources, online or telephonic check-ins, or other innovative methods.	This model may include online education, home delivery or pick-up of educational resources, online or telephonic check-ins, or other innovative methods paired with traditional classroom instruction. On-Site Learning may be delivered on alternative schedules to accommodate requirements for social distancing.	On-Site Learning may be delivered on alternative schedules to accommodate requirements for social distancing and augmented with targeted distance education strategies for those students and teachers who are unable to enter school buildings.
When is this option available?	After approval of your application by the Department for the 2020-21 school year.	After your Return-to-Learn Plan is received in CASA.	After your Return-to-Learn Plan is received in CASA.
Are students required to participate?	Yes.	Yes.	Yes.

Question	Step 1: Required Continuous Learning	Step 2: Hybrid Learning Plan	Step 3: On-Site Delivery Plan
Are there equity concerns for subgroups of students?	Yes. Equity must be considered for all students, including subgroups.	Yes. Equity must be considered for all students, including subgroups.	Yes. Equity must be considered for all students, including subgroups.
Are there FAPE (free and appropriate public education) concerns for special education that we should consider?	Yes. IEP teams must determine how FAPE will be provided through remote learning methods.	Yes. IEP teams must determine how FAPE will be provided through remote learning methods or provided as schools reopen and change service delivery methods.	Yes. IEP teams must determine how FAPE will be provided as schools reopen and change service delivery methods.
Can we grade materials submitted?	Yes.	Yes.	Yes.
Can we award credit?	Yes.	Yes.	Yes.
What application/paperwork should the district fill out with the state?	Districts and nonpublic schools must complete the application to provide Required Continuous Learning services as part of the Return-to-Learn Plan due July 1, 2020.	Districts and nonpublic schools must submit a Return-to-Learn Plan due July 1, 2020.	Districts and nonpublic schools must submit a Return-to-Learn Plan due July 1, 2020.

Questions and Additional Guidance

If you have questions, please contact [Brad Niebling](#), [Barb Guy](#), or [Barbara Ohlund](#). For additional COVID-19 guidance and information, please visit the Department's [COVID-19 webpage](#).