



KENTUCKY DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

Superintendents' Webcast

SUMMARY

WEBCAST DATE: AUGUST 11, 2020

CONTENT SUMMARY PUBLISHED IN KENTUCKY TEACHER:

KDE, superintendents discuss delay of in-person school to Sept. 28 due to COVID-19
By Jim Gaines – August 12, 2020

Discussion during the Kentucky Department of Education's (KDE) Aug. 11 [Special Superintendents' Webcast](#) focused on Gov. Andy Beshear's recommendation that schools delay holding in-person classes until at least Sept. 28 due to the high rate of COVID-19 in Kentucky. With the state's positive test rate above 5% and more children testing positive for the virus, Interim Commissioner of Education Kevin C. Brown said the state doesn't want to have the same experience as Cherokee County School District in Georgia. Cherokee County reopened schools on Aug. 3, only to shut down again when more than 250 students and staff had to quarantine after multiple positive COVID-19 tests in the first week of classes.

Lt. Gov. Jacqueline Coleman said that as a former teacher and assistant principal, and with a husband who's also a teacher, she knows starting classes with non-traditional instruction (NTI) is difficult. But Kentucky's rate of children testing positive for COVID-19 spiked 40% in July, meaning schools need to be as cautious as possible, she said.

"Every decision we've made has been based on the health and safety of people in the school buildings," Coleman said.

Even if schools follow the best health practices, she said, they can't control what students do outside schools that may expose them to COVID-19.

Coleman warned against falsely equating school attendance with grocery shopping or activity at any other business. Sitting at separated outdoor tables or maintaining personal distance during a short shopping trip does not carry the same risk as sitting in an enclosed classroom for hours or moving through crowded halls, she said.

Every state in the country is dealing with the same issues and is coming to the same conclusions, Coleman said. They are all pushing back school opening dates or only starting classes online, she said.

“This is not just a Kentucky thing. This is not just a Governor Beshear thing,” Coleman said. A number of superintendents, who said they are under pressure from their communities and school boards, wanted a stronger directive than Beshear’s recommendation. Brown acknowledged that pressure, but said that so far all of Kentucky’s 171 school districts have followed state recommendations voluntarily.

If a district decides to open for in-person classes before Sept. 28, Brown said he’d schedule a group conference call with school leadership to discuss why.

“My goal would be to have a different outcome at the end of the conversation,” he said. Those schools also would be risking an outbreak, which would force them to close anyway and potentially draw national attention, Brown said.

Schools can allow a few students at a time into buildings to pick up equipment or orientation material, Brown said, and KDE will work with the Department for Public Health (DPH) to provide standards for that.

The goal is to reduce the number of people in school buildings and contact between people, Brown said. That means schools should send home anyone who is able to work remotely, including teachers, he said.

Asked if teachers can bring their own children to work with them, KDE Interim General Counsel Todd Allen said that is a local decision. But if it’s allowed, there should be protocols in place to keep those kids from congregating and ensure they wear masks consistent with [Healthy at School](#) guidance, he said.

Other superintendents asked whether athletics can be held while classes are all virtual, and Brown said the Kentucky High School Athletic Association is working on “multiple scenarios” and its board will meet Aug. 20 to discuss the issue.

Due to the nature of career and technical education, state-operated area technology centers (ATCs) will serve students in person if that is allowed, said David Horseman, KDE associate commissioner in the Office of Career and Technical Education. If feeder school districts are closed, their ATC students will be handled virtually.

“We plan to serve the students in whatever capacity their district allows them to and (however) we’re allowed to operate,” he said.

Suicide Prevention Training

Many schools are asking how to hold state-mandated annual suicide prevention training while schools are closed for in-person learning. This year in particular, the training is vital because COVID-19 adds to stress, isolation and fear which may increase suicide risk, said Patti Clark, program manager for prevention and promotion at the Kentucky Department for Behavioral Health, Developmental and Intellectual Disability (DBHDID).

[KRS 156.095](#) requires schools to provide suicide prevention information on an annual basis to all students in grades 6 through 12 either in person, by live streaming or via video recording by Sept. 15.

Nearly 15% of Kentucky middle and high school students feel unsafe at school, which makes them four times as likely to attempt suicide, Clark said. Suicide is among the leading causes of death for young people.

The state recommends keeping with the Sept. 15 deadline, said Beck Whipple, DBHDID Suicide Prevention Coordinator. Schools should establish a clear avenue, including virtually, for students to talk to a trusted adult, he said.

Clark noted that the Society for the Prevention of Teen Suicide offers free online courses at [SPTSuniversity.org](#), including videos aimed at specific age groups, including parents and teachers. The courses address COVID-19-related concerns, with some Kentucky-specific information in the works, she said.

Guidance on Libraries and Class Size

New KDE guidance on [library media centers](#) and allowable [class sizes](#) for NTI was issued Aug. 10.

The library guidance references KDE’s previous “flagship” guidance but contextualizes it for the largest classroom in many schools, the library media center. This guidance has information on distancing, sanitizing and general operations specific to libraries, said James Allen of the KDE Office of Education Technology.

He pointed out that there are two major partners who can play a major role in library media services. Kentucky Educational Television offers lots of free and high quality content, as does the Kentucky Virtual Library, to which most schools subscribe.

Many school districts also are partnering with their local public libraries, said Marty Park of the KDE Office of Education Technology.

“We would highly recommend that,” he said.

In setting class sizes during NTI, schools with site-based decision-making (SBDM) councils can adjust their policies at the local level, said Kelly Foster, KDE associate commissioner in the Office of Continuous Improvement and Support. The few schools and programs which don’t have SBDMs will need state exemptions to increase class sizes. Foster said those schools and programs can [email her](#) to get the necessary form.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS ADDRESSED DURING THE WEBCAST:

Agenda Item: Discussion on Gov. Beshear’s Recommendation to Delay Return to In-Person Classes

Presenter: Kevin C. Brown, KDE interim commissioner

Lt. Gov. Jacqueline Coleman, secretary, Education and Workforce Development Cabinet

Comment: The word “recommendation” needs to be “order” and sent from the governor or KDE.

Reply: It has been a source of pride that education decisions have taken place through governor’s recommendations, which are based on the best medical expertise Kentucky has. This practice recognizes local control. The Kentucky School Boards Association (KSBA) will hold a virtual meeting for local board members to explain the decision. Districts who do not follow the governor’s recommendation will be asked to participate in a conference call to discuss concerns. Possible actions for defying the recommendation are the use of executive order by the governor, the Kentucky Department for Public Health (DPH) has authority to close buildings during a public health emergency, the Kentucky Board of Education (KBE) has authority to pass emergency regulations if they believe the health and safety of public school students is in jeopardy and there could be local consequences, such as an outbreak of COVID-19.

Question: What additional measures are the governor planning to take in addition to shutting down schools? The decision on bars and restaurants seems to contradict the decision on schools, and consistency is important.

Answer: That is a false equivalency. Events and restaurants are not the same thing as a classroom or school hallway.

Question: What is the status of athletics? It does not look good to continue with sports when it is recommended to delay in-person classes.

Answer: The Kentucky High School Athletics Association (KHSAA) has planned for several scenarios, depending on the data. Decisions about any changes to their current plan, which have run parallel to education decisions, will likely be made at the Aug. 20 KHSAA Board of Controls meeting. Alternative sports calendars are under review currently.

Question: Will governor's recommendation be applied to state-operated area technology centers (ATCs) or will their operation be based on local districts?

Answer: KDE is currently operating with the understanding that all 171 districts will delay in-person classes until Sept. 28. The Office of Career and Technical Education has been preparing multiple plans to serve students in the capacity of their feeder district. If the ATC is in a district that is not holding in-person instruction, then students will have access to virtual instruction.

Question: Why is the governor recommending delaying in-person learning when every county in Kentucky is below 5% positivity except for three?

Answer: Kentucky is a state in which people cross county lines frequently.

Question: Are regional metrics available? Working as a region to meet reopening goals would motivate people to follow the rules.

Answer: The possibility of obtaining regional data is being explored currently.

Question: Please clarify the guidelines around the size of gatherings. Are schools limited to 50 or 10 people?

Answer: Related to the education setting, if schools are not having in-person classes, they may bring groups of 10 or fewer together for specific needs, such as counseling or picking up materials. The Healthy at School guidance will be updated with details.

Question: What is an acceptable number of students to report for in-person learning? The governor shared that engaging "small groups" is encouraged.

Answer: Further guidance will be provided. Districts should keep in mind staffing needs and equity.

Question: What is the expectation for staff working in school buildings during non-traditional instruction (NTI).

Answer: The overall goal is to reduce the capacity of buildings and increase social distancing when possible. Districts are encouraged to allow staff to work from home if they can perform their job duties from home.

Question: Will the governor and commissioner help the public understand that there will be consequences for not adhering to the recommendation? This is more than a simple recommendation.

Answer: The safety of students and staff is the driver behind education decisions and recommendations.

Question: There at least 20,000 university students returning to campus within our school district. Why are universities open and K-12 are not?

Answer: There are huge concerns around the reopening of colleges and universities, and the lieutenant governor is working with the Council on Postsecondary Education (CPE) to work through the issues. Colleges and universities face different challenges than K-12 schools. Please remember that Kentucky is not the only state dealing with this issue. All 50 states have made the decision to delay the start of school and/or begin instructional virtually.

Agenda Item: Suicide Prevention During the Time of COVID-19

Presenters: Dr. Patti Clark, program manager

Beck Whipple, state suicide prevention coordinator

Kentucky Department for Behavioral Health

Question: We are potentially providing suicide prevention training for students when they are off campus and could be in a non-safe place. Will the deadline be extended to accommodate in-person training?

Answer: Delaying the training is potentially putting kids contemplating suicide in danger, even though the circumstances of virtual training may not be ideal.

Question: How will districts provide suicide training virtually for students who have no device or internet connection?

Answer: A plan will have to be developed. It is possible that regional prevention centers could assist by providing training for groups of 10 students per session. The discussion guides may also be helpful, as well as making sure students have access to the crisis prevention numbers. Districts were reminded that from the public health perspective, suicide is the second leading cause of death for children ages 10-14, behind accidental injuries.

Question: If districts do not start school at all until Sept. 28, how will that affect the Sept. 15 deadline for providing suicide prevention training?

Answer: Districts can meet most students virtually. In the coming weeks, guidance is needed from the Department for Behavioral Health about documentation that could be mailed to

students. Districts who plan to begin instruction on Sept. 28 need to contact [Kelly Foster](#) to determine next steps.

Question: How should districts document having had the suicide training with students? Can they come in small groups of 10 or less numerous times for those without internet?

Answer: That will be addressed in the forthcoming guidance, but there is a certificate students and staff can forward after the virtual training has been completed.

Agenda Item: New KDE Guidance – Library Media Centers

Presenters: James Allen, library media specialist

Marty Park, chief digital officer

KDE Office of Education Technology

There were no questions on this topic.

Agenda Item: New KDE Guidance – Virtual Class Size

Presenters: Kelly Foster, associate commissioner, KDE Office of Continuous Improvement and Support

Marty Park

There were no questions on this topic.

Agenda Item: COVID-19 Updates with the Kentucky Department for Public Health (DPH)

Presenters: Dr. Connie White, DPH deputy commissioner

Emily Messerli, DPH immunization branch manager

Question: Where can districts access the county positivity rates?

Answer: County rates are not easily accessible because laboratories are only required to report positive cases and not total tests, which makes it impossible to determine the county positivity rate. All testing laboratories are now completing daily surveys with the information required to determine county positivity rates, so more information may be available soon. Other county data is available on Kentucky's COVID-19 [page](#), such as the number of confirmed cases and death rate. The Harvard Global Health Institute created a [map](#) with color-coded risk levels which shows the number of new daily cases per 1,000 people at the county level.

Comment: If positivity rate is the "metric" then districts need that information.

Response: The positivity rate is not the "metric," and it is not possible to determine county positivity rates currently. The statewide positivity rate is one metric, along with information about travel between counties and travel to out-of-state hotspots. That was the reasoning behind the governor's recommendation.

Question: Is the reference to small groups of 10 or less related to only students in schools, or adults too?

Answer: The group of 10 refers to social gatherings or activities that do not have guidance. The Healthy at Schools document outlines the expectations and best practices for conducting in-person learning, and the Healthy at Work guidelines will cover staff activities.

Question: To clarify, may districts have more than 10 students in before Sept. 28?

Answer: Guidance will be provided. The governor mentioned that it may be possible to have 10 or few students in school for specific purposes, such as collecting Chromebooks and providing specialized services. This will not be a work-around for bringing large groups of students into buildings for regular instruction. If small groups of students are in the building for specific purposes, attention must be given to issues of equitable access and the number of staff in the building.

Question: Some local doctors are saying that local health departments are not accepting numbers of negative tests. Is this artificially inflating the positive rate?

Answer: That is the problem, that negative test results are not reported accurately. The laboratories processing the tests have the most accurate data, and DPH is now coordinating with the laboratories to obtain complete data and hopefully determine positivity rates by county.

Agenda Item: General Question and Answer Session

Presenter: KDE leadership team

Question: May districts count NTI days as 7-hour days, as permitted in the spring?

Answer: That topic is under consideration and will be discussed during the Aug. 18 webcast.

Question: How do districts record participation for NTI during these weeks?

Answer: [Guidance](#) has been released on this topic. Record participation as you would for students who already planned to receive virtual instruction.

Question: Must districts still administer the Brigance kindergarten screener?

Answer: The KBE waived the timelines associated with administering the Brigance screener, so districts will administer the screener when they are able to.

Question: Does the governor's recommendation apply to private schools?

Answer: KDE does not regulate private schools, but private school and archdiocese school representatives have been included in communications. They have followed governor's recommendations thus far, but it is unknown if they will adhere to the most recent recommendation.

Question: We need clear guidance on having teachers in the buildings. Can they work with the Healthy at Work guidelines being 6 feet apart and masking when necessary?

Answer: Yes, districts may have staff in buildings following Healthy at Work guidelines. Accommodations for staff with conditions related to COVID-19 must be considered. Districts are encouraged to bring staff in for reasons of improving instruction and not only because they can. Teleworking is encouraged when possible, especially while Kentucky is in the apex of the virus.

Question: What is the recommendation for engaging classified staff during remote learning?

Answer: Additional guidance is forthcoming, as this is a different situation for districts than it was in the spring. Possibilities include assigning classified staff as assistants to certified staff and assigning classified staff to answer the extra telephone calls that will be received due to current circumstances. Districts are encouraged to submit their own creative ideas for using classified staff for use in guidance documents.

Question: Can teachers bring their own children to work with them?

Answer: That is a local decision for superintendents and building leaders. If staff bring their children to work, the children should follow the Healthy at School guidelines.

Comment: Many school districts have a fall break planned at the end of September/early October. People are going to take off for Florida, etc. during fall break and then we are right back where we started.

Response: Districts can adjust their calendars as needed. Fall breaks may be canceled if instruction does not start until Sept. 28, but this will most likely be an issue if families choose to travel to states where there is a high positivity rate.

Question: May districts provide in-person services to special education students during virtual instruction before Sept. 28?

Answer: There will be guidance to give clarification during the week of Aug. 17.

Question: Should districts anticipate the recommendation for in-person opening to be cancelled again on Sept. 28?

Answer: Everyone hopes that in-person instruction can resume, and that school can stay in session, on Sept. 28, but decisions are made based on the information that is available at the time. There are no promises that can be made, but everyone hopes for in-person instruction to resume on Sept. 28.

Question: Districts will need to provide transportation for students to pick up Chromebooks and have orientation. Will that be permissible following guidance?

Answer: That will be addressed in forthcoming guidance.

Question: When will the new guidance be available?

Answer: During the week of Aug. 17.

Question: What guidance should districts follow for staff that are high risk?

Answer: This has been addressed in previous guidance documents. Districts should determine whether the employees qualify for leave under the Americans with Disabilities Act and allow teleworking if possible. Specific questions not covered in previous guidance should be addressed to [Kay Kennedy](#).

Agenda Item: Adjournment

Presenter: Kevin Brown

Discussion:

Brown reminded participants that a town hall for local board members will be held to address questions and concerns around the recommendation to delay in-person instruction until Sept. 28.

Districts which do not intend to abide by the recommendation should contact [Brown](#) to begin discussions. Brown thanked everyone for the valuable discussion and their hard work on behalf of Kentucky's students.

The next superintendents' webcast is scheduled for Tuesday, Aug. 18, at 2 p.m. ET.