



KENTUCKY DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

Superintendents' Webcast

SUMMARY

WEBCAST DATE: JULY 28, 2020

CONTENT SUMMARY PUBLISHED IN KENTUCKY TEACHER:

Contact tracing should be in full force by start of school, Kentucky superintendents told
By Jim Gaines – July 29, 2020

A system of contact tracers should be deployed in almost every local health department in Kentucky by the end of July, according to Mark Carter, executive adviser to the Cabinet for Health and Family Services.

Before COVID-19 hit, there were about 430 people in health departments statewide doing disease investigation and contact tracing, he said during the [Special Superintendents' Webcast](#) on July 28. Historically, those tracers focused on diseases such as HIV and tuberculosis, he said.

But many more qualified staff were needed to help control COVID-19. Contact tracing staff has more than doubled, and by the time school is scheduled to restart, another 260 tracers should be added, Carter said.

He walked through what contact tracers would and wouldn't ask when investigating a COVID-19 case at a school. Real contact tracers will never ask someone's Social Security number, passwords, banking information or immigration status, Carter said.

"We've been really concerned about fraud," he said. Anyone asked for those details, instead of where someone has been or who they've been with, should hang up and report it to the Kentucky Attorney General's office, Carter said.

There's lots of misinformation on social media, but the Contact Tracing and Tracking communications team has developed lots of trustworthy materials, he said. Most of it is available at kycovid19.ky.gov. Local health departments and the state Department for Public Health (DPH) can provide it as well.

Healthy at School Revision

A one-page revision of the DPH and Kentucky Department of Education's (KDE) flagship Healthy at School guidance document is being issued in response to new recommendations from

the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), said Dr. Connie White, DPH deputy commissioner.

In previous webcasts, many school districts have asked if they could install plexiglass dividers in classrooms. Health officials initially opposed that idea out of concern for cleaning time, secure installation and possible sharp edges.

But if plexiglass shields are securely mounted, have no sharp edges and are regularly cleaned, they will be allowed, White said.

Emily Messerli, DPH immunization branch manager, said plexiglass shields could be used in classes with young children or special needs students who may have difficulties wearing masks. The dividers should not be used just to fit more students in a classroom, she said.

White said dividers provide an extra layer of protection, but they are no substitute for maintaining a 6-foot distance, so if students are closer than that they still will need to wear masks.

Guidance from the CDC also has changed and that is incorporated in the Healthy at School revision, White said. Previously, people who tested positive for COVID-19 had to wait at least 10 days since symptoms appeared and go 72 hours without fever – and without use of fever-reducing medication – before returning to school.

While people still must wait 10 days after the onset of symptoms, they now only need to be fever-free for 24 hours, White said. A negative COVID-19 test is not required for return to school, she said.

Finally, the original guidelines to send home anyone with a cough inadvertently included people with pre-existing conditions that can cause a chronic cough, such as asthma, White said. The new rule is to send home only those with a “new, uncontrolled cough” which causes trouble breathing, she said.

COVID-19 Rates Rising

Dr. Deborah Birx, White House Coronavirus task force coordinator, was in Kentucky on July 26 as a “sign of concern” about the rising rate of COVID-19 cases here and in surrounding states, said Interim Commissioner of Education Kevin C. Brown. He hopes Gov. Andy Beshear’s renewed restrictions, announced July 27, will help bring the infection rate down so school can resume. For now, it is the governor’s recommendation that in-person classes start no sooner than Aug. 17.

Other countries have brought COVID-19 rates down through diligent mask use, fast contact tracing and quarantining, and Kentuckians can do the same, White said.

“We can see them go down as quickly as the 17th of August. This can be done,” she said.

Reopening schools won’t be possible unless communities respect health guidance, Messerli said. Schools, superintendents and teachers need to communicate to the public that if they want their kids in school, social distancing and mask-wearing are vital, she said.

“It’s a community effort to get the children back into school,” Messerli said.

Brown stressed the risk of traveling to COVID-19 hot spots, not just for students but also for school employees. Gov. Beshear recommends that athletes and school staff who travel for events to a state with a positive COVID-19 test rate above 15% should self-quarantine upon their return, White said.

Food Service Guidance

Two more guidance documents on school reopening have been released, for a total of 18 so far. One is on “Food Service Operations – Waivers for USDA School Meal Programs” after the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) issued several nationwide waivers for meal programs that last through June 30, 2021.

The added flexibility is different from how food was distributed in spring 2020, said Lauren Moore, KDE’s director of the Division of School and Community Nutrition. The waivers allow food service to enrolled students on days instruction occurs, whether in person or remotely, she said.

The standards are subject to further change, Moore said.

For now, meals can be served during a planned school day, whether in person or through non-traditional instruction (NTI), but not during planned closures, such as weekdays or holidays, Moore said. The state still is seeking guidance from the USDA on whether meals can be offered during unanticipated closures, such as cancellation due to COVID-19, she said.

The waivers do not allow community feeding models such as those used in the spring, said Katie Embree, KDE’s school meal programs branch manager in the Division of School and Community Nutrition. There are three models for feeding during NTI:

- **Meal pick-up services**, in which a student or their parent or guardian picks up food at school and takes it home, preferably in a “drive-through” style or with staggered pick-up times;
- **Sending meals home with students** during an in-person instruction day for consumption on following NTI days; or
- **Offering meal delivery** at normal bus stops or direct to households.

For all methods, schools must have ways to keep track of meals and prevent duplication, Messerli said.

Staffing Flexibility

The second new guidance is “[Flexibility for Assigning Staff in the COVID-19 Instructional Setting](#),” which comes in response to staffing concerns from several school administrators, said Associate Commissioner Rob Akers of KDE’s Office of Educator Licensure and Effectiveness.

Districts can use a digital learning provider such as Apex, Edgenuity or Odysseyware to deliver instruction, and any teacher certified on the content and population can serve as Teacher of Record to facilitate those courses, he said. Any certified teacher can serve as an additional

instructor when needed, such as when the primary teacher is appearing on video in one classroom to allow for social distancing.

There is some flexibility in allowing teachers to teach up and down grade levels, he said. Those with 1-8 elementary certification can teach all subjects up to 8th grade. Others are more restricted in what they can teach, but districts can apply for emergency certification if there are no qualified candidates to teach a subject.

Any questions can be directed to KDE's [Crystal Hord](#), [Todd Davis](#) or [Akers](#).

Questions & Answers

Question: What's the decision from the County Employees Retirement System (CERS) on allowing service credit based on hours worked instead of days?

Answer: Kentucky Retirement Systems (KRS), which oversees CERS, issued a memorandum that suggests as long as classified employees work the same number of hours during a variable student instructional year as they would work in a traditional school year, that will count as a full year of service credit, KDE Interim General Counsel Todd Allen said. Any further questions should be directed to KRS.

Question: If school staff use all their paid time off while out sick, what happens if they're later told to quarantine?

Answer: School districts have a few options, Allen said. The state Board of Education is expected to approve an emergency regulation allowing districts to provide additional COVID-19-related leave based on locally developed criteria, he said. A recently issued guidance document lays out the options.

Question: Since a high percentage of people carrying COVID-19 show no symptoms, are temperature checks at school doors really useful?

Answer: The CDC says 16% of infected children are asymptomatic, meaning 84% will have some symptom, of which fever is the most common, White said. Temperature checks are the simplest way to catch many people before they enter a school and are in contact with lots of people, she said.

Brown said temperature checks are a logistical challenge, but KDE fully supports the policy. He reiterated the July 1 announcement that 12,500 digital thermometers are being distributed free to schools through area development districts.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS ADDRESSED DURING THE WEBCAST:

Agenda Item: Healthy at Schools Document Update

Presenter: Connie White, M.D., Deputy Commissioner, Kentucky Department for Public Health

Question: If there is Plexiglas separating students, must 6 feet of social distancing be maintained for students to remove their masks?

Answer: Students should wear masks if 6 feet of social distancing cannot be maintained. Plexiglas dividers do not go all the way to the ceiling and only provide an additional layer of protection. Plexiglas may be particularly useful in classroom where students are not wearing masks, such as preschool and special needs classrooms.

Question: Will the temperature check guidelines be changing?

Answer: No.

Question: If classrooms use Plexiglas, is there any flexibility with social distancing and masking?

Answer: No, it is an extra layer of protection and not a replacement for social distancing and masking.

Question: If a student is removed from a classroom with COVID-like symptoms, should there be a protocol in place to remove students from that same classroom for a certain period of time (24 hours) for cleaning?

Answer: Possibly, if the child ended up testing positive for COVID-19.

Question: Is there an update on the requirement that employees self-assess and take their temperatures at work, rather than at home, which is allowed by the governor's [Healthy at Work](#) guidance?

Answer: Checking temperatures on site is an added layer of protection. Temperatures do not have to be recorded, just checked.

Question: With the current travel advisory, should districts enforce mandatory quarantines for athletes and staff members who have traveled to a state with a 15% or higher positivity rate?

Answer: That is the governor's recommendation.

Question: Is there a target date in August that districts can expect to know if the request to begin with NTI would be extended beyond August 15?

Answer: It takes about two weeks to see the result of policies such as masking in public and closing bars. The governor will use the number of cases to make determinations about in-person instruction. Districts are encouraged to watch the press conferences. If the number of positive cases decreases, that is a good sign. If the number increases or holds steady, it may mean more time is needed.

Agenda Item: U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Waivers for Food Service Programs

Presenters: Lauren Moore, director, and

Katie Embree, branch manager, KDE Office of Continuous Improvement and Support

Question: May districts use summer feeding criteria to serve students learning virtually?

Answer: Currently the USDA is allowing school meal programs. KDE is submitting waiver requests to allow summer meal service options and will keep districts updated as new information is received.

Agenda Item: Certification and Permissions Flexibility

Presenter: Rob Akers, KDE Associate Commissioner, Office of Educator Licensure and Effectiveness

Question: Is the "Flexibility for Assigning Staff" guidance a stand-alone document to be released to districts?

Answer: Yes. The [guidance document](#) is housed with KDE's other [reopening resources](#).

Agenda Item: Contact Tracing

Presenter: Mark Carter, Executive Advisor, Kentucky Cabinet for Health and Family Services

There were no questions on this topic.

Agenda Item: General Question and Answer Session

Presenter: KDE Leadership Team

Question: Is the County Employees Retirement System allowing a full year of service credit based upon hours worked instead of days?

Answer: KDE received guidance from Kentucky Retirement Systems (KRS) that classified employees will receive credit for a full year of service if the classified employee works the same number of hours under a variable student instructional year as the employee would work during a typical instructional year. Further questions should be directed to KRS.

Question: How many regular education students can teachers at each level (elementary, middle/high) be assigned to monitor during virtual instruction? If class size restrictions per KRS 157.360 are required will a waiver be requested?

Answer: KDE staff are currently developing guidance to address class cap size in a virtual setting.

Question: How fast are positive test results returned? If it takes days to receive test results, what should districts do with students who were tested for COVID-19?

Answer: There is no great answer for this question, but DPH continues to work with laboratories in Kentucky to increase capacity and reduce waiting times for COVID-19 test results.

Question: Studies about air conditioning are painting a murky picture. Many schools have several rooms without windows. What is KDE's advice?

Answer: Districts with concerns about ventilation should contact the office of State School Security Marshal Ben Wilcox to discuss the options for possible waivers of the requirement to lock classroom doors during the instructional day. Wilcox's office may be reached at DOCJT.ExternalCommunication@ky.gov or (859) 622-1328.

Question: If staff are sick and exhaust their leave as provided in school district policy, what happens if they must quarantine again?

Answer: A few options exist. KDE anticipates that the Kentucky Board of Education (KBE) will approve a waiver allowing districts to grant additional emergency leave to staff who must miss work for reasons related to COVID-19. If an employee is sick and cannot work, unpaid disability leave is an option to consider if there are no paid leave options available. Guidance has been

released by the U.S. Department of Labor regarding the options available under the Families First Coronavirus Relief Act, which also contains long-term Family Medical Leave Act information. KDE released a [guidance document](#) outlining the various leave options available to district employees. Additionally, KDE posted a [leave comparison chart](#) and a [leave flow chart](#).

Question: In a hybrid learning model with room capacity already maximized, how should schools handle new enrollments or transfers that would exceed the room capacity guidelines for face-to-face instruction?

Answer: The certification flexibilities could be used during this situation. Students could receive instruction planned by the teacher of record if a certified teacher is overseeing the instruction and collaborating with the teacher of record.

Question: The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) webinar said that Coronavirus Aid Relief and Economic Security (CARES) Act funds lose their federal status once they go to the governor's office. Are CARES Act funds exempt from federal match? What about other federal programs such as Title I, Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and 21st Century Community Learning Center (21CCLC) for federal benefits? How are CARES Act funds different?

Answer: The current understanding is that there is a 25% match for CARES Act funds through FEMA. Written clarification will be provided when KDE has obtained confirmation.

Question: Can CARES Act funding be used to pay for any extra costs associated with unlimited emergency days, including extra costs for substitute teachers?

Answer: Districts are encouraged to find other funding sources for recurring costs, but CARES Act funding can be used for substitute teachers if the expense is related to COVID-19.

Question: Dr. White stated that 60%, or even up to 80%, of people with COVID-19 are asymptomatic and the CDC does not recommend temperature screenings for students. What is the reason for keeping this requirement?

Answer: Dr. White was referring to the general population, but only 16% of children are asymptomatic, according to the CDC. Temperature checks are a simple way to screen students and possibly reduce the spread of the virus, so DPH still feels this is an important safety step to adhere to.

Question: Would it be better for teachers to take their temperatures at home and not even come into the school building rather than having the temperature taken at school? It is difficult to get a substitute when the teacher is walking in the door.

Answer: Teachers may certainly check their temperatures at home for that purpose, but administrators will have the extra layer of protection by verifying all staff are afebrile.

Question: When the district is contacted with a confirmed case, what is the recommendation on sending out general communication to all parents and not only those who are part of contact tracing?

Answer: Contact tracers will contact families whose children have been in close contact with anyone who tests positive for COVID-19. General communication is a district decision, though districts are encouraged to plan such communication carefully and adhere to the requirements of the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA).

Question: Fund 51 balances are in real trouble due to the reduction in meals served and a loss of meal reimbursement funding. Are there any plans in place to address this issue?

Answer: KDE will continue to advocate for extra funding for districts and there may be another round of stimulus money available for districts. Governor's Emergency Education Relief (GEER) and Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) funds are available to help with meal service challenges, but there is no clear answer about what will happen, as no one knows when the pandemic will end.

Question: Regulations require suicide training to middle and high school students by Sept. 15. Will there be an adjustment on this due to the current situation? If not, how would KDE recommend districts provide this training and follow up with multiple students by Sept. 15 virtually?

Answer: An extension has not been discussed and the content of the training is critical for students currently. Any flexibility must include virtual options and a commitment to provide the training as soon as possible. KDE will provide information to districts about how to complete the training virtually, without having to delay it.

Question: If districts use an emergency waiver for COVID-19 purposes, will this count as the one-time emergency certification allowed?

Answer: If the teacher has never had an emergency certification in the past, no waiver is needed; the district would file for the emergency certification as usual. A waiver is needed when a teacher has previously had an emergency certification. Districts may contact [Crystal Hord](#) for specific questions on individual teachers.

Question: If a district has developed a plan based to go back to in-person learning full-time with small cohorts of students, how would a hybrid plan help and why would districts be forced to do that?

Answer: This is only a discussion topic with superintendents right now and there is currently no requirement to implement a hybrid calendar. Districts should continue to plan for changes as new data becomes available in the state.

Question: If districts have both remote and face-to-face school and remote classes are at cap, then five more people want remote instruction, how can districts handle exceeding cap sizes when there is capacity in face-to-face classes but not remote?

Answer: KDE will research this issue and provide clarification on cap sizes.

Question: Six feet social distancing when students consume meals may not be achievable, especially at lunch when districts must provide duty-free lunch to teachers. What are the consequences if districts cannot create 6 feet of space when kids eat their meals?

Answer: Physical distancing is critical when masks are down and must be adhered to during meals.

Question: Does the no in-person prohibition until August 15 apply to summer school?

Answer: KDE and DPH will research the issue and provide the answer as soon as possible.

Question: Is KDE in communication with the Kentucky Education Association (KEA) regarding duty-free lunch and cap size issues?

Answer: KDE has been in contact with KEA and it is currently advised that districts develop plans to provide duty-free lunches, as that is not considered for a waiver currently. KDE will research this cap size issue and provide clarification when information becomes available.

Agenda Item: Adjournment

Presenter: Kevin C. Brown, KDE interim commissioner of education

Discussion:

Brown thanked everyone for their hard work on behalf of Kentucky's students.

The next superintendents' webcast is scheduled for Tuesday, Aug. 4, at 2 p.m. ET.