



# Residential School Program Guidance

## Updated March 27, 2020

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In Texas there are different types of educational programs and settings related to K-12 education that have a residential component. There are nonpublic residential programs and residential facilities (RF) that fall under Texas Education Agency (TEA) jurisdiction in some manner. To clarify:

A **nonpublic residential program or school** supports students with disabilities who for educational reasons have been placed for educational and residential purposes via an admission, review and dismissal (ARD) committee determination at the nonpublic residential program or school. Through an individual education plan (IEP) process, an ARD committee may make the determination that a student requires placement in a nonpublic day or nonpublic residential placement to meet their educational needs.

A **nonpublic day school** is a private school or facility that supports students with educational needs that cannot be met in a public school setting. This placement is determined by an ARD committee. Nonpublic day schools do not provide residential programs. Instead, local education agencies (LEAs) provide transportation to students attending these schools.

A **residential facility (RF)** or a residential treatment center (RTC), supports students 22 years of age or younger who reside in the facility for detention, treatment, foster care, or any non-educational purpose providing 24-hour custody or care of students. RTCs are required to offer access to educational programs and are denoted as RF in ASKTED and within TEA systems. For the Texas Education Agency, RF and RTC are the same.

Both general education and special education students can be placed in RF settings. TEA provides guidance for the educational components provided by RFs. However, the RF operates the residential services under the licensure of another state agency such as Health and Human Services or the Department of Corrections.

LEAs are required to serve students with disabilities residing in RFs located within the LEAs' geographic boundaries and/or jurisdictions. Some charter schools operate campuses within RFs. The Commissioner and the TEA have jurisdiction over these educational entities.

### Guidance

On March 19, 2020, Governor Abbot issued an [executive order](#) providing that "schools shall temporarily close" beginning 11:59 p.m. on March 20, 2020, until April 3, 2020. This order is applicable to school services provided at both nonpublic residential schools or programs and residential facilities, with the following considerations:

- Above all, prioritize the health and safety of students, staff, and communities.
- Traditional brick and mortar "school" programs and school services under the Governor's executive order must close. However, nonpublic residential schools or programs and

residential facilities can maintain the residential components of their programs. This will allow students in these programs to remain in the residential units during the school closure.

- Residential facilities and nonpublic residential units operating while school programs are closed are expected to follow the guidance provided by [Health and Human Services](#).
  - For students with disabilities, LEAs should reference the [COVID-19 and Special Education Q&A](#)
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### **Q1 Does the Governor’s executive order apply to nonpublic day schools?**

**A1:** Yes. Nonpublic day schools are considered “schools” in the executive order issued by Governor Abbot on March 19, 2020. As such, LEAs should work to notify families of school closures in effect until April 3, 2020. LEAs electing to provide instructional services through alternative means during school closures must plan for and provide the provision of a free and appropriate public education (FAPE).

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### **Q2 What if a nonpublic residential program closes operations completely due to COVID-19?**

**A2:** LEAs should be in communication with their contracted facilities and families to formulate plans in the event of full facility closure. Additionally, plans should be made for instructional continuity for these students during closure.

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### **Q3 What if a residential facility (RF) closes the facility completely due to COVID-19?**

**A3:** The RF should be in communication with its licensing agency to determine next steps and make appropriate plans. Again, guidance provided by the Department of Health and Human Services should be followed should the facility close. Campuses operating within the RF will need to take measures to provide for the instructional continuity for its students during closure.

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### **Q4 What should an LEA do regarding transportation of students if the LEA is closed but a nonpublic day school is open?**

**A4:** As of 11:59 p.m. on March 20, 2020, as detailed in the Governor’s order, “schools” were ordered to close their brick and mortar programs, which included nonpublic day programs. LEAs are not required to provide transportation while they are closed. However, LEAs that are providing education through virtual or other means to students while closed must provide FAPE for all students with disabilities, including those in nonpublic day settings. LEAs should consult the [TEA COVID-19 Special Education Q&A](#) regarding FAPE.

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**Q5 Would the residential restriction also apply to Texas School for the Deaf (TSD) or Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired (TSBVI)?**

**A5:** Yes, the Governor’s executive order closing schools through April 3, 2020, applies to all brick and mortar school programs, including school programs provided by TSD and TSBVI. LEAs who are providing education through virtual or other means to students while closed must provide FAPE for all students with disabilities, including those in TSD and TSBVI. LEAs should consult the TEA COVID-19 Special Education Q&A regarding FAPE.

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**Q6: What is the expectation of a residential facility if the student is returning from an out-of-state visit/break?**

**A6:** Facilities should work with the contracting LEA and their respective licensing authorities. School districts have the right to control and restrict access to campuses. School districts and charter schools should consult with their local health authorities and incorporate any guidance provided by the local health authorities into their decision on whether to permit a student or staff member access to public school facilities. Title 25, Texas Administrative Code (TAC), Sec 97.7, articulates the discretion a school administrator has when a child has or is suspected of having a communicable condition. This issue is addressed on a case-by case basis.

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**Q7: My residential treatment center (RTC) uses a different structure than traditional schools. What process should we consider? Can we have teachers on campus and just not interact with students? Is an RTC exempt from the prohibition on in-person educational services?**

**A7:** Per the Governor’s order, school buildings, where students congregate together, are to close. Schools must commit to supporting students instructionally while absent from the school grounds.

For some RTCs, students are housed on the broader school grounds. So remote instructional support could look different. Instruction must be completed where students and teachers are not congregating together in groups. Facility staff should maximize social distancing while supervising students accessing remote instruction. Note: RTCs must consider the needs of students with disabilities while provide remote instruction. See [this guidance on ARD requirements](#) which remain in place.

With regard to teacher access to the school campus and classrooms: RTCs would be no different than other schools. Teachers and other staff can continue to have physical access to the school but should do so in very small numbers at any one time to maximize social distancing. If a school is located in an area where a local stay-at-home order has been issued, access to school facilities for instructional continuity must be addressed by the affected school district or charter school consistent with the requirements of the local order.

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