

Planning for Instructional Continuity During High Absenteeism and School Closures

The purpose of this document is to provide guidance to Texas public school districts and open-enrollment charter schools in planning for instructional continuity for high absenteeism or school closures for short-term or long-term periods of time. The reasons for absences or school closures vary and may range from illness to natural disasters.

School closure may be a preventive measure or the result of high absenteeism. Closures may involve a single campus, multiple campuses, or be district- or area-wide. Whatever the situation, districts should be prepared with plans to support continuity of learning under multiple scenarios.

Various considerations school administrators should include as part of the planning process and examples of instructional delivery options are outlined in this guidance document.

Leadership structure

The first step in the planning process requires the creation of internal leadership structures to address design, development and delivery of the instructional continuity work plan. This team may include business office leaders, staff who serve special populations, technology, and educational technology staff in addition to curriculum and instruction staff.

1. What are the objectives of each individual who will be contributing to continuity of learning solutions?
2. How are the objectives achieved?
3. What are the essential and critical products/services of each division?
4. Who is involved (internally and externally) in the achievement of the objectives?
5. What are the time imperatives on the delivery of the objectives?

It will also be important to identify the essential or critical activities that cannot be interrupted or unavailable for a prolonged period of time without significantly jeopardizing each division's objectives.

Considerations and challenges

There are multiple questions and challenges to address when planning for instructional continuity due to high absenteeism or school closures. In general, the questions align with the following categories:

- Timing within the school year
- Scale of student and educator absenteeism or school closure
- Duration of the absenteeism or closure
- Instructional planning to ensure coverage of Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) and / or Texas State Prekindergarten Guidelines
- Instructional material and resource availability
- Access to technology

- Communication strategies and support systems

The following list of detailed questions may be used to adjust existing instructional plans or create a new instructional plan. The list represents some of the questions that should be considered when creating or reevaluating a plan and is not exhaustive in nature.

Timing within the school year

1. How might the plan need to vary if the absenteeism or closures occur during the beginning, middle, or end of the school year; beginning or end of the semester?

Scale of student and educator absenteeism or school closure

1. What instructional plans can meet the needs of all students if there is high student absenteeism?
2. What contingency is in place if there is high teacher and administrator absenteeism at that same time?
3. How does the plan meet the needs of students and educators if a campus closure is advisable?
4. How does the plan meet the needs of students and educators if multiple campus or district-wide closure is advisable?
5. How does the plan account for rolling student and educator absenteeism?

Duration of absenteeism or closure

1. What is the anticipated length of absenteeism or closure?
2. Does the plan address a variety of durations of absenteeism or school closures? (e.g. What is the three-week plan? What is the six-week plan? What is the semester or school year plan?)
3. Under what circumstances will the plan be implemented?

Instructional coverage of Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) and / or Texas State Prekindergarten Guidelines

1. How does the plan address which student expectations have been covered and which remain to be covered in each course at the time the plan is implemented?
2. What instructional methods will be used?
3. Who will provide the instruction?
4. How will educators monitor student progress? How will student proficiency be assessed?
5. Are processes in place to record and report student grades (and credit earned) during a closure?
6. What professional development and practice is needed to prepare teachers and administrators to provide instruction in alternative settings?
7. What training and practice is needed to prepare students and parents to participate in instruction in alternative settings?
8. What steps will be taken when students and educators return to school to close any gaps in coverage of content and mastery of the curriculum standards?

Instructional material and resource availability

1. What instructional materials and resources are available for students and educators for home use and are materials digital or hard copy? Is an inventory of these resources available or do resources require updating?
2. Do resource playlists need to be created for students to see a sequence of resources, activities, and check-ins with educators?
3. If materials are hard copy are there sufficient resources for all students who may need access to the materials?
4. How will all students, including students with disabilities, receive or gain access to the instructional materials?
5. How will educators receive or access instructional materials?
6. If an instructional materials gap is identified, how will the gap be closed?
7. If instructional materials are provided electronically, how will the technologies be maintained during a campus, district, or vendor closure?

Technology access

1. What devices are available for students and educators for home use?
2. What access do students have at home to mail, phones, smartphones, email, cable, electronic devices such as computers or tablets, adaptive devices, and the internet?
3. What access do educators have at home to mail, phones, smartphones, cable, devices, adaptive devices, and the internet?
4. Can students/parents and teachers/staff access campus and district instructional systems such as learning management systems and student information systems and digital resources?
5. How does the plan address early childhood programs that may not have access or ability to use online platforms?
6. Does the campus have a technology lending program in place for devices and internet access?
7. If the campus has limited devices available for lending, how will the campus prioritize which students receive the equipment (e.g., a high school might prioritize graduating seniors)?
8. How will the district address adaptive technologies for home use?
9. Can district or regional education service center online systems and resources scale to meet demand?
10. Is any training required for students, parents, or educators to successfully use an identified technology solution? Are best practices in place and available to students, parents, and educators?
11. What type of technology support is available to students and educators at home?
12. Who will offer the technical support if there is a campus or district-wide closure?

Communication and support systems

The instructional continuity plan should also cover communication and support systems required to implement the plan.

Communication strategies

1. How will students, educators, and parents communicate? Will non-traditional methods be required?
2. When will students, educators, and parents communicate?
3. Is contact information current for students, parents or guardians, and staff?
4. Are privacy policies in place for sharing personal student information with educators as part of plan implementation? (e.g., email addresses or phone numbers)
5. How will educators interact regularly and directly with students to support student learning? Will interactions follow existing bell schedules or is a new communication matrix required to avoid scheduling conflicts?
6. When and how can students contact educators if they are in need of assistance? Will educators establish virtual office hours during which they are available to students as needed?

Support systems available at home

1. Will a parent, guardian, or other responsible adult be at home to help students with instructional questions or activities?
2. Will a parent or guardian have the technical knowledge and ability to address technical support questions or challenges?
3. Will a parent, guardian, or other responsible adult be asked to monitor student progress?

Support systems available at the district

1. What services, support structures, or technical assistance exists within the district to assist each campus with plan implementation? (e.g. Mass mailings, printing, turn-key content creation, and digital learning options)
2. What services, support structures, or technical assistance does an education service center (ESC) offer that will aid in the implementation of the plan? What capacity does the ESC have if multiple districts experience closure? What contingency plan does the ESC have in case the ESC also experiences closure or experiences demands that exceed capacity?
3. What is the current approved vendor list for instructional and technology resources? How do vendor agreements support plan implementation? (e.g. Are permissions and licenses in place to copy materials? What capacity do the vendors have and to what level of support? What contingency plan do vendors have should they also experience closure or experience demands that exceed capacity?)
4. Are new partnerships required to implement the plan? (e.g. Coordination with institutions of higher education for dual credit courses)

5. What professional development is in place to prepare district staff for plan implementation?
6. What staffing plans are in place to cover educator absences?
7. What training or information is critical for parents to receive about aiding in the instructional process?

Instructional delivery at a distance

There are multiple instructional delivery methods that can be used to support the instructional continuity plan. These options range from no technology to technology- assisted instructional solutions and technology-integrated solutions. Instructional strategies will vary with each solution. Examples of the many possible options are listed below. Inclusion of a particular product or tool listed in this guidance is not approval of or endorsement by the agency and the list is not exhaustive. Selections should be based upon local policies that take into account privacy, security, and accessibility.

Print packets

Print packets can be distributed to students and educators prior to or during an absence or school closure. Without the aid of other technologies, the packets can be designed for self-study or self-study with home support and guidance. Districts have TEKS-aligned print resources available through the state instructional materials adoption process and may also have locally created resources. Districts may also have vendor agreements with permissions to print digital resources for home use.

For prekindergarten programs, the curriculum used by the district may have instructional materials such as printable books, games, and family activities available. To keep instructional delivery engaging, the use of manipulates and hands-on materials should be included. Districts can provide activities that can be easily implemented at home using common items found in the home. (e.g. Counting spoons, building with cups, sorting laundry, etc.)

Sources of TEKS-aligned and Texas Prekindergarten Guideline resources include the following:

- Free: CLI Engage Family Engagement Resources, CLIEngage CIRCLE Activity Collection: Family, Texas Aquatic Science Curriculum
- Fee: The TEKS Resource System

A list of content sources is located in Appendix A. Districts should select the resources that align to the TEKS and Texas Prekindergarten Guidelines.

Phone systems and audio conferencing

Teachers can use phone systems to check in with students working on self-study packets or arrange for conference calls to deliver instruction. Conference calls can be used for collaborative projects or student work groups. Students can also reach out to teachers during established times to seek instructional support.

In situations where students have smartphones and supporting data plans, chat features, video features, and email can be added to the instructional plan.

For younger students, teachers can check in with family members to support their efforts of assisting the student in their work.

Districts have the responsibility for providing education to their enrolled students. Inclusion of a particular product or tool listed in this guidance is not approval of or endorsement by the agency and the list is not exhaustive.

Email and chats

In the absence of a more sophisticated technology solution, but in instances where all students have access to email, email can be used for content distribution, review of student work, and instructional support. Video and text chat applications allow for real-time interactions among educators, students, and families throughout the instructional process in instances where all students have access to a smart phone.

Text and video chat applications

- Free: Facetime, iChat, Google Duo

Presentation slides with Audio

Presentations with added audio narratives is another low technology solution that can be leveraged to provide instruction to students. These presentations can be distributed via email or through accessible school networks.

- Free: Screencastify
- Free/Fee: Google Slides
- Fee: Microsoft PowerPoint, Apple Keynote

Collaboration tools

Collaboration tools offer more opportunities for teacher-to-student interactions, as well as, student-to-student interactions. These tools fall under various categories but have features that blend into other categories. For instance, web meeting applications may include screen sharing, whiteboards, and polling features.

Video conferencing tools / Web meeting tools

- Free and fee: Zoom, Skype, Hangouts Meet
- Fee: GoToMeeting™, Adobe® Connect™, AnyMeeting Video Conferencing, Microsoft® Teams

Virtual whiteboards

- Free: Jamboard
- Free and fee: Twiddla, LearnCube, ezTalks, Ziteboard, myViewBoard®, Explain Everything
- Fee: Scribblar, Binfire

Online collaboration and communication tools

- Free: Piazza
- Free and Fee: Padlet, Buncee, Zoom, Skype

- Fee: Scribblar

Web-based resources

If students have internet access, online resources can be used in self-study scenarios or in teacher-directed sessions using any of the above methods. Districts should ensure educators are selecting TEKS-aligned content from these sources. (See Appendix A for a sample list of resources by curriculum area.)

Online learning systems

Where remote access to in-district or in-region, learning management systems is available to all students and educators, instruction can continue as planned.

- Free: Moodle
- Fee: Canvas, Blackboard, Google Classroom, Schoology, Edmodo

Online courses

Districts and ESCs with existing online course offerings may choose to scale their programs where there is remote access and an instructional sequence fit with classroom courses. Districts seeking options due to educator absenteeism may choose to investigate availability of course seats in the Texas Virtual School Network (TXVSN) Statewide Course Catalog.

The TXVSN provides Texas students and schools with access to high-quality, interactive, instructor-led online courses taught by state-certified and appropriately credentialed teachers trained in effective online instruction. Students are not required to be physically present on campus during instruction to be eligible to generate FSP funding for courses taken through the TXVSN; the district or charter school can earn these funds regardless of where the student is located while receiving instruction. For more details see Appendix B.

TEA-accredited, full-time, virtual schools

The TXVSN Online Schools program is a free TEA-accredited, public-school option available to eligible students in grades 3-12. Total enrollments are subject to the capacity of each TXVSN virtual campus. (See Appendix B.)

TEA-accredited special purpose schools

Texas Tech University (TTU) K-12 and the University of Texas UT High School are TEA-accredited, special purpose public school districts that offer tuition-based online courses and programs. (See Appendix C.)

Instructional TV and online video

Districts with experience in producing in-school instructional television programs, may choose to partner with local Public Access Television operators to create and offer recorded or live instruction for students. Districts may also create instructional videos for distribution via online video sharing services.

Online video sharing services

- YouTube
- Vimeo

Additional Instructional Considerations

In instances in which significant barriers exist to providing a more complete and robust instructional program, districts should prioritize instruction in the foundation subjects of reading language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies.

The instructional continuity plan should include as many suggestions for parents to provide enrichment and alternative learning opportunities as possible. For example, to the extent possible, students should be provided with books to take home and read independently.

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Appendix A: Content Sources

Districts have the responsibility for providing education to the students. Use of a particular resource listed in this guidance is not approval of or endorsement by the agency and the list is not exhaustive.

Sources of TEKS-aligned and Texas Prekindergarten Guideline resources include the following applications.

Multiple Curriculum areas

- TEKS Resource System
<https://teksresourcesystem.net/module/profile/Account/LogOn>

Prekindergarten

- CLI Engage Family Engagement Resources
<https://cliengage.org/public/tools/quality/family-engagement-resources/>
- CLI Engage CIRCLE Activity Collection: Family
<https://cliengage.org/public/tools/materials/cac-family/>

The following websites offer content in print or video format. Districts should review and ensure TEKS or Texas State Prekindergarten Guidelines alignment.

Mathematics

- Khan Academy
<https://www.khanacademy.org/>

Science

- TEEAC Provider resources
<https://tea.texas.gov/sites/default/files/TEEAC%20Providers%202019-20.pdf>
- Watershed Education <https://www.austintexas.gov/department/watershed-youth-education>
- Texas Parks and Wildlife Department
<https://tpwd.texas.gov/education/>
- Khan Academy
<https://www.khanacademy.org/>
- Children's Museum Houston
<https://www.cmhouston.org/classroom-curriculum?exhibits=%5B%5D&grades=%5B%5D&page=1&subject=%5B%5D>

- Nueces Delta Preserve Classroom Activities by grade band
<https://www.nuecesdeltapreserve.org/classroom-activities/>
- AskTheScientist.org
<http://www.askthescientist.org/>
- Guadalupe River Authority aquatic resources
<https://www.gbra.org/education/elementary.aspx>
<https://www.gbra.org/education/secondary.aspx>
<https://www.gbra.org/education/presentations.aspx>
- National Marine Sanctuaries
https://sanctuaries.noaa.gov/education/ocean_guardian_prog.html
- North Plains Groundwater Conservation District
<http://northplainsgcd.org/conservationprograms/classroom/>
- Texas Memorial Museum
<https://tmm.utexas.edu/education>
- Texas Nature Trackers
https://tpwd.texas.gov/huntwild/wild/wildlife_diversity/texas_nature_trackers/
- Texas Water Development Board
<https://www.twdb.texas.gov/conservation/education/kids/index.asp>
- Texas A&M Tree Trails
<https://tfsweb.tamu.edu/treetrails/>
- Westcave Preserve <https://westcave.org/resources/teacher-resources/videos>
- The Physics Classroom
<https://www.physicsclassroom.com>
- National Science Foundation
<https://www.nsf.gov/news/classroom/biology.jsp>
- BioInteractive
<https://www.biointeractive.org>
- National Science Teaching Association
<https://www.nsta.org/publications/freebies.aspx>

- National Education Association
<https://www.nea.org/tools/lessons/55410.htm>
- Understanding Science
<https://undsci.berkeley.edu/>
- Earth Exploration Toolbook
<https://serc.carleton.edu/eet/index.html>
- Ask A Biologist
<https://askbiologist.asu.edu/>
- ACS Chemistry for Life
<https://www.acs.org/content/acs/en/education/resources/k-8.html>

Social Studies

- Khan Academy
<https://www.khanacademy.org/>
- PBS LearningMedia
<https://www.pbslearningmedia.org/>
- EDSITEment
<https://edsitement.neh.gov/>
- Library of Congress Teacher Resources
<https://www.loc.gov/teachers/>
- National Archives
<https://www.docsteach.org/>

Appendix B: The Texas Virtual School Network

The [Texas Virtual School Network](#) (TXVSN) provides Texas students and schools with access to high- quality, interactive, instructor-led online courses taught by state-certified and appropriately credentialed teachers trained in effective online instruction. The TXVSN has two components: a [statewide catalog](#) of supplemental online courses for credit toward high school graduation and a 100% virtual, free, [full-time TXVSN Online Schools \(OLS\) program](#) that serves eligible public school students in grades 3-12 who reside anywhere in Texas.

The TXVSN online learning initiative was established by the Texas Legislature and is administered by the Texas Education Agency (TEA). A network of eligible course providers offer online courses through the TXVSN and are responsible for instruction. TXVSN courses are teacher-led; aligned to the Texas Essential

Knowledge and Skills (TEKS), national standards for quality online courses, and accessibility standards; and are approved by the TEA.

Districts and charter schools are eligible to receive Foundation School Program (FSP) funding based on a student's successful completion of TXVSN courses. Students are not required to be physically present on campus during instruction to be eligible to generate FSP funding for courses taken through the TXVSN; the district or charter school can earn these funds regardless of where the student is located while receiving instruction. Texas Education Code, Chapter 30A limits FSP funding to no more than three courses per student per semester, except for full-time TXVSN online schools that were in existence on January 1, 2013.

TXVSN Statewide Course Catalog

The TXVSN catalog is a supplemental program that works in partnership with a student's home district or charter school. In operation since January 2009, the [catalog](#) offers high school, Advanced Placement, and dual credit courses provided by eligible Texas school districts and open-enrollment charter schools, regional education service centers (ESCs), institutions of higher education, and private and nonprofit providers.

TXVSN OLS Program

To be [eligible to enroll full-time](#) in the TXVSN, a student must have been enrolled in a Texas public school in the preceding school year with exceptions allowed for a student in substitute care and military dependents. Eligible public school students in grades 3-12 from across the state may enroll in one of the districts and open-enrollment charter schools authorized by the TEA to operate a [free, full-time TXVSN OLS public-school](#).

Appendix C: Special Purpose Texas Public School Districts

Texas Tech University (TTU) K-12 and the University of Texas UT High School are TEA-accredited, tuition-based special purpose public school districts and, therefore, may provide instruction, award state credit toward graduation, and issue a Texas public high school diploma to students of all ages. A student enrolled in either of these online public schools is a public school student. A student may enroll at any time and must pay tuition for these courses. Grade placements and credits awarded are accepted by other public schools in the state and the diploma issued is a Texas public school diploma. Instructional programs and courses offered through TTU K-12 and UT High School have not been reviewed by the TEA.

Contact information for the special purpose Texas public school districts follows:

- Texas Tech University K-12
<http://www.depts.ttu.edu/ttuisd>
800-692-6877
- The University of Texas at Austin UT High School
<https://highschool.utexas.edu>
866-361-8847