



# **Reset, Recover, Reimagine** Connecticut's Path Forward



Connecticut State Department of Education

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## Letter from Commissioner of Education Miguel A. Cardona

Dear Education Community,

I hope you and your families are well when you receive this letter. Without question, everything we took for granted about our approach to PreK–12 education was disrupted by the pandemic. We went from practicing in an educational model that had been consistent for hundreds of years, to educating students remotely while managing the intense effects of a worldwide pandemic.

We will have years to examine retroactively the impact this has had on our school communities; however, we can state with certainty that we have already seen an American perseverance that is unparalleled. Whether it is the brave front-liners who walk into environments that threaten health and safety to protect, care for, and serve others, or our educators who continue feeding, emotionally connecting with, and teaching our learners, we have demonstrated our resilience to moving forward through this challenge.

As we plan for the reopening of Connecticut public schools, student and staff safety will be at the center of our decisions. In addition to collecting the perspectives of students, parents, educators, and community partners, the reopening guidelines were reviewed and adjusted by our public health experts. Maintaining safety as the top priority means that what school looks like will have to be reexamined. It is perfectly normal to grieve our cherished experiences as students, educators, parents, and school partners, but in order to maintain the health and safety of our school communities, we must accept that things will be different. We cannot assume things will go back to the way they were earlier this year. In fact, we know that they will not.

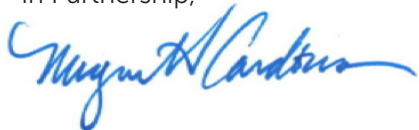
At the Connecticut State Department of Education, our mission is to increase equity and excellence in all schools, so our students have a range of options for College and Career when they graduate. We strive to support the development and delivery of high quality learning materials for students to ensure consistent standards and access, regardless of community resources.

This crisis will strengthen our resolve to promote that mission, and also require us to pursue new areas of focus. Traditional measures of assessing growth, achievement, and access may need to adapt. Since remote learning will likely be a part of the plan moving forward, our efforts around equity and access will need to include addressing availability of learning devices and internet connectivity. Connectivity should not be a barrier for learning, socialization, support services, or remote telehealth for our learners. Another area of focus will be amplifying social emotional supports for students because the shared trauma we face as a world will enter our schoolhouses when our students return.

These new areas of focus will require a community effort. We will need communities that have come together to collaborate these past months to show the same spirit, the same unity, and the same passion for helping one another well into the future.

We will face many challenges, inconveniences, and frustrations as we begin the slow process of returning our students to their schools. While this worldwide disruption has impacted what we value in our schools, it has also given us an opportunity to reimagine how best to meet the needs of our learners. With the collective input of our students, families, and educators, we must not strive to go back to what we were before, but to aim higher. With the resilience, dedication to students, and heightened sense of service shown from our educators over the last few months, I am confident that public education in Connecticut has its brightest days ahead!

In Partnership,

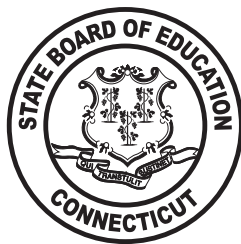


Miguel A. Cardona, Ed. D.  
Commissioner of Education  
State of Connecticut



## Acknowledgments

The leadership of the Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE) and the members of the State Board of Education would like to acknowledge the incredible work of the entire department staff during the COVID-19 pandemic. The creation of the materials compiled in this document would not have been possible without the contributions of each member of the CSDE team. We also recognize that this pandemic will forever change the way public education looks in our state and across the nation. The success of our districts going forward will depend directly on the work of our dedicated leaders and staff.



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Ned Lamont, Governor

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## Legal and Policy

### Assessment/Testing Waivers

The CSDE submitted a request to the United States Department of Education (USED) on March 20, 2020, seeking a waiver from federal assessment and accountability requirements for the 2019–20 school year in light of the COVID-19 pandemic. The CSDE received [formal approval](#) on March 27, 2020, that Connecticut can implement the provisions of this waiver, which includes no summative testing (Smarter Balanced, NGSS, CT SAT, CT Alternate Assessment, and CT Alternate Science Assessment) and no Next Generation Accountability System reporting for the 2019–20 school year. Consequently, the administration of the Connecticut Physical Fitness Assessment was also cancelled for the remainder of the 2019–20 school year; the CSDE will not be collecting and reporting any Physical Fitness Assessment results for the 2019–20 school year, including any assessments that may have already been administered by the school district. Since many students in Grade 11 use the Connecticut SAT School Day for college acceptance/placement, the CSDE is working closely with the College Board to provide school day or weekend testing options in the fall that afford all students the opportunity to take an SAT assessment. Please visit the [CT SAT School Day website](#) for the most current information.

Furthermore, [Governor Lamont's Executive order 7N](#) suspended all state assessment for the 2019–20 year, including:

1. the aforementioned state summative assessments which are reiterated in Connecticut General Statutes Section 10-14n;
2. universal screening reading assessments for students in all districts in Grades K–3 pursuant to C.G.S. Section 10-14t; and
3. administration of the end-of-year reading assessments in priority school districts in Grades K–3 pursuant to C.G.S. Section 10-265g.

For 2020–21 and beyond, please see the CSDE's guidance document on [Sensible Assessment Practices](#).

### Waiver Provisions for Grants

On April 9, 2020, the State Department of Education requested a waiver from the United States Department of Education to various grant provisions pursuant to Section 3511 of Division A of the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (CARES Act), P.L. 116-136 (H.R. 748), 34 Stat. 281 (Mar. 27, 2020). Our requested waiver on behalf of the Department and its subgrantees (e.g., local educational agencies (LEAs) was approved. Further information regarding the flexibilities we have received can be found in a [memo](#) sent to superintendents.

### CARES Act Funding

Governor Ned Lamont [announced](#) on May 14 that the State of Connecticut is receiving \$111 million in federal coronavirus relief aid for the state's school districts that will be used to support continued learning and address educational disruptions due to the global pandemic.

The funding was awarded by the U.S. Department of Education under the Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund (ESSERF) of the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Security (CARES) Act that was adopted by Congress in March. It will complement the \$27.8 million already announced for the Governor's Emergency Education Relief Fund. ESSERF is the main federal funding stream dedicated to supporting the state's pre-K through 12 system during the COVID-19 crisis. The federal government allows for significant flexibility in how the state and local school districts spend the grant so that existing education funds can be repurposed to areas of highest need, mitigate fiscal impacts, and immediately address educational disruptions. Read [a description of how to apply for funds](#).

## Educator Evaluation and Support

With the cancellation of public school classes effective March 17, 2020, and extended for the remainder of the 2019–20 academic year, the Connecticut State Department of Education has issued a [Temporary Waiver of C.G.S. Section 10-151b: Educator Evaluation Requirements](#). In response to questions received, Chief Talent Officer Dr. Shuana Tucker has issued End of Year Recommendations for Educator Evaluation and Support, which provides guidance on bringing closure to the current school year, and planning for the start of the 2020–21 school year.

Governor Lamont's [Executive Order 7E](#), waives the 180-Day School Year for 2019–20, and confirms that schools may close on their normally scheduled end dates as long as local and regional boards of education provide opportunities for continuity of education to all students, to the greatest extent possible, and consistent with federal and state guidance. With the transition to distance learning, professional learning opportunities for educators, feedback, and support should be available to educators to ensure that students are doing well and are engaged in the learning process.

### End-of-Year Recommendations for Educator Evaluation and Support

[Temporary Flexibilities – Non-Renewal and Tenure](#)

[Temporary Flexibilities for Termination Processes – 45-Day Extension to Hearing Timeline](#)

## Executive Orders Affecting Education and Child Care

On March 10, 2020, Governor Ned Lamont invoked two types of states of emergency due to the COVID-19 pandemic: a "civil preparedness emergency" under Connecticut General Statutes § 28-9, and a "public health emergency" under § 19a-131. Since ordering these states of emergency, the Governor has issued a series of executive orders, generally addressing these emergencies and to mitigate the impact of this pandemic. Many of these orders relate to addressing the disruption on the education of students in Connecticut. Read [a summary of the orders concerning education and early childhood](#), courtesy of the General Assembly's Office of Legislative Research.

## Child Nutrition Programs

Through the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Child Nutrition Programs (CNP), Connecticut schools provided nutritious meals and snacks to children (age 18 and younger) during school and child care program closures due to COVID-19 and have transitioned into continuing to provide meal services throughout the summer months. Due to the extenuating circumstances of COVID-19, the CSDE applied for and received approval to implement several waivers to the normal USDA regulatory requirements, such as allowing meals to be distributed in areas that are not traditionally eligible; non-congregate meal service (i.e., to-go meals); meal pattern/meal component flexibilities; provision of multiple meals at one time for future consumption; parent/guardian pick up of meals in the absence of the child; and, bus route delivery and home delivery of meals. These waivers support efficient and safe access to nutritious meals, while enforcing recommendations from public health experts with regard to social distancing measures. Under the authority of the USDA and the CSDE, many of Connecticut's CNP sponsors, primarily schools, have shifted operations from the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) to the Summer Food Service Program and Seamless Summer Option meal service models and are continuing to serve free meals to children.

Following the cancellation of Connecticut school classes in mid-March, the CSDE authorized 130 CNP sponsors to serve emergency breakfast, lunch, and snacks to children at 458 sites in Connecticut and an additional supper meal and snack at 123 school sites through the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) At-Risk Afterschool Meals Program and 13 closed child care centers. The school sites provided approximately 115,000 meals per day, including breakfasts and lunches, with close to 12-million total meals served by school districts and bringing more than \$34,142,952 in federal funds into local economies. Programs are continuing to use a combination of meal delivery methods over the summer months, including making meals available for pick up at schools (including academic summer schools), parks, YMCAs, Boys and Girls Clubs, community centers, athletic fields, and town human services offices.

### **Pandemic Electronic Benefits Transfer Program (P-EBT)**

The CSDE has partnered with the Connecticut Department of Social Services (DSS) to implement the Pandemic Electronic Benefits Transfer (P-EBT) program. The P-EBT program provides households that lost access to free and reduced-price meals provided during the school year through the USDA School Breakfast Program (SBP) and National School Lunch Program (NSLP) with a debit card that contains the value of the free school breakfast and lunch reimbursement rates for the days that schools are closed (5.70 per day). Eligible households are those whose children are certified to receive free or reduced-price school meals, and children who attend schools that offer free school meals to all students through the SBP and NSLP (such as community eligibility schools-CEP). The P-EBT program has provided a one-time benefit of \$364.80 per child to over 287,500 children in approximately 193,240 Connecticut households with benefits totaling over \$104,888,755 in three waves from May 16 through June 21.

### **Tenure and Non-renewal**

Due to extended school closures as a result of the COVID 19 pandemic, the Connecticut State Department of Education has issued [guidance](#) pertaining to flexibilities for local or regional boards of education related to non-renewal notifications and tenure for non-tenured teachers, pursuant to Connecticut General Statutes (C.G.S.) Section 10-151. This guidance provides extended timeframes for the hearing process and non-renewal notice, as appropriate, to preserve due process for teachers and ensure that districts have the time they need to make informed employment decisions.

### **Termination Process**

Commissioner of Education Dr. Miguel Cardona has provided [additional guidance](#) pertaining to flexibilities for termination proceedings involving tenured teachers, pursuant to Connecticut General Statutes (C.G.S.) Section 10-151 (d). This guidance addresses the circumstances where conducting in-person meetings or hearings would be in conflict with the social distancing recommendations for the protection of public health. This guidance officially modifies the provisions of C.G.S. Section 10-151 (d) to extend the hearing process timelines by 45 days.

## **Academic and Social and Emotional Resources**

### **Distance Learning**

As part of the Connecticut State Department of Education's (CSDE) response to the COVID-19 pandemic, we have worked to create a number of resources for our districts, educators, students, and families. CSDE has vetted numerous resources that are a combination of print and digital materials to support student learning. In addition to the resource guides, CSDE has also provided regular resources to the RESC (Regional Educational Service Center) Repository that is accessible statewide. The repository houses useful resources for districts, families, and students. The CSDE has held a number of webinars for families and educators covering topics including social-emotional learning and family engagement, to guidance on English language learners and special education. In addition, the CSDE has begun to share district best practices so that educators have the opportunity to learn directly from one another. Some of these best practices have been posted on our [website](#).

### **Governor's Learn From Home Taskforce and Laptop/Scholastic Book-kit Distribution**

Governor Lamont and Commissioner of Education Dr. Miguel Cardona formed the COVID-19 Learn From Home Task Force (LHTF) to lead the effort to ensure every student has access to high-quality learning content at home. The LHTF's first task is to lead the safe, efficient, and timely distribution of two philanthropic donations intended to advance equitable access and support continuity of education at home, including the gift of up to 60,000 laptops to high school students, as well as more than 185,000 high-quality Scholastic book packs by the Nooyi Family for PK–8 grade students.

Beyond that, the LHTF has been charged to further examine levels of distance learning participation across the state with a heavy focus on connectivity. This will be accomplished through a survey that will better understand levels across districts allowing the Department to examine data and produce data-driven solutions. Visit the LHTF [website](#).

## Grading

CSDE has provided guidance for districts in determining student grades for the second half of the 2019–20 school year. In particular, the Department identified [potential options](#) for pass/fail grading policies that districts may adopt in lieu of letter grades. Further, the guidance announced that all Connecticut colleges and universities — both public and private — have agreed to accept pass/fail grades on transcripts for student work that was completed at the commencement of distance learning, as well as the calculation of GPAs based on the semesters graded with letter grades.

## Graduation

On June 5, Governor Lamont signed Executive Order 7XX which outlined updated graduation guidelines. The Order states that drive-in graduation ceremonies at which all attendees remain in vehicles except for graduates briefly leaving vehicles to receive diplomas may be held with no limitations on capacity if either: (a) vehicle windows remain closed or (b) vehicles remain at least six feet apart and all attendees wear masks or cloth face coverings. The order also allows for the Commissioner of Education to issue [mandatory guidance](#) for the safe conduct of such ceremonies.

## Resources for English Learners

During the school closures due to COVID-19, the CSDE has continued to provide school districts and families with resources and supports for English learners (ELs). To help districts and families meet the needs of ELs through distance learning, a range of communications have been developed, posted, and widely shared. Outreach to the field and to parents has come in many forms, such as the development, vetting, and posting of resource lists; distribution list communications; the development of live and recorded webinars; attendance at RESC and professional organization meetings; and the creation of new guidance documents for the field. Additionally, districts have continued to receive technical assistance, as needed, by communicating with the CSDE via email, phone, and teleconferencing.

The CSDE's approach to helping meet the needs of ELs during distance learning is founded on three critical components: students' supplemental language instruction education programs, their general education programs with embedded accessibility tools, and communication with the families of ELs. In addition to resources posted on the [CSDE's COVID-19 page](#) under the Multilingual Learners heading, the [English Learners page](#) is continually updated with resources and guidance documents. Live webinars have included [High-Quality Distance Learning Resources for ELs](#) and [Best Practices for Serving English Learners](#), and a recorded webinar called "Parents' Online Resources for Emergent Bilingual Students," is available in both [English](#) and [Spanish](#) and includes strategies, resources, and college and career readiness. Additional webinars and resources are currently being developed and reviewed. Also, the [Pathways to Success for English Learners](#) series is available to support the professional learning needs of educators. The series includes nine open-source, accessible, and on-demand web modules focused on high-quality practices and instructional strategies for serving ELs in various and demographically diverse contexts. The modules are intended primarily for generalist educators and leaders, such as grade level educators, content area secondary teachers, and building administrators.

The CSDE remains committed to supporting ELs, their families, and their teachers during this unprecedented time and will continue to seek feedback, develop resources, and help with technical assistance needs.



## Social-Emotional Supports

The CSDE had established social and emotional well-being as a priority before COVID-19, given its relationship to improving conditions for learning and ultimately improving students' school and life outcomes. The COVID-19 related trauma, anxiety, and distance from the relationships formed at school during the long period of class cancellation have intensified the need for quality social-emotional supports for students as well as educators. The CSDE has developed a series of social and emotional support resources for families and educators that can be found on [CSDE's COVID-19 page](#), the [CSDE Professional Support Series for Districts page](#), and the [CSDE Professional Support Series for Families page](#).

## Special Education Guidance

CSDE's Bureau of Special Education (BSE) has created guidance and [resources](#) to support students, educators, and families during the COVID-19 national pandemic. The guidance and resources reflect the collaborative efforts of a variety of stakeholders contributing to their content and development. Within the context of rapidly changing public health information and safety as the foundation, these resources were designed to support the continuity of learning for students with disabilities across the state.

In keeping with state and federal directives issued in response to COVID-19 during this period of school closure, the Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE) has created guidance for educators and families regarding students exiting special education services in June 2020, either due to graduation with a regular high school diploma or due to exceeding the age of eligibility under state law. It is important to note that the federal Office of Special Education and Rehabilitation Services has not communicated to states any temporary flexibility or waiver from the requirements of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Similarly, existing state requirements regarding termination of a student's eligibility to receive special education services remain controlling at this time.

Additionally, the BSE has developed several webinars in collaboration with internal and external partners, which are posted to the [CSDE Professional Support Series for Districts webpage](#), within the [Guidance on Special Education](#) and [Early Childhood and Distance Learning](#) sections, as well as to the [CSDE Professional Support Series for Families](#) webpage, within the [Support for Students with Special Needs](#) and [Early Childhood](#) sections.

## The CT Learning Hub

On June 30, 2020 the CSDE launched the [CT Learning Hub](#). With the CT Learning Hub, we are ensuring every child across Connecticut will have access to free and safe online and offline resources to support learning, social emotional well-being and engagement. As students and families visit the CT Learning Hub, they can explore eight learning hubs for resources, activities, services and professional learning.

When a teacher, student, or parent uses the CT Learning Hub, they will be able to choose from a menu of resources for core content (numeracy, literacy, science, social studies, SEL and project based learning), professional resources like lesson planning and blended learning templates, parent resources on how to support learning at home and other digital and non-digital resources (online and offline).

As we learn and grow together, we welcome your feedback and ideas through emails at [sde.CTLearningHub@ct.gov](mailto:sde.CTLearningHub@ct.gov).

## Re-Opening Rules and Guidance

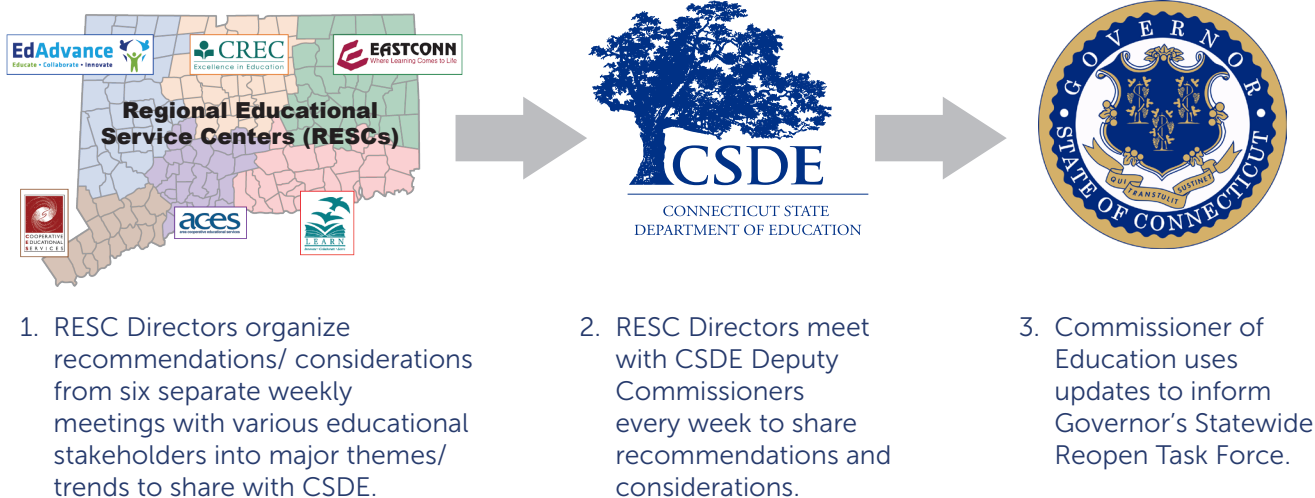
### Summer School Rules

On May 18, 2020, Governor Lamont issued [Executive Order 7PP](#), which placed a limitation on the operation of summer and educational programs operated by local or regional boards of education by prohibiting summer school programs from beginning prior to July 6, 2020, unless earlier extended, modified, or terminated by the governor. It requires the Commissioner of Education to issue [guidance](#) on the limited operation of summer school programs that are permitted to engage in-person classes after that date. The Executive Order also suspends or modifies regulatory requirements to protect public health and safety by permitting the Commissioner of Education to temporarily waive, modify, or suspend any regulatory requirements as he deems necessary to reduce the spread of COVID-19 and protect the public health.

### Reopening Plan

The Connecticut State Department of Education has partnered with educational leaders and stakeholders from across the state including students, parents, teachers, administrators, unions, boards of education, Regional Education Service Centers, and public health professionals, among others, in conjunction with the Governor's Office, Office of Policy and Management, and the Department of Public Health to thoughtfully construct a plan to reopen schools in the fall. While the 2020–2021 school year will look unlike any we have ever seen, schools will plan to open which will take the educational and health needs of students, teachers, staff and administrators into mind. Read a copy of the [plan](#).

#### Regional Advisory Teams



## Valuable Resources

[Governor's Executive Orders](#)

[211 United Way Coronavirus Information](#)

[CDC General cleaning & disinfecting Guidelines](#)

[Handwashing materials](#)

[Facilities & ventilation](#)



## Connecticut State Department of Education

<https://portal.ct.gov/sde>