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Across the country, elementary, secondary and postsecondary schools have closed as part of the effort to slow the spread of COVID-19 (the coronavirus). Each week, IDRA issues an update on the impact of COVID-19-related policies on schools, students and families.

More resources and trainings for teachers, school administrators, families and communities are on our [Learning Goes On website](#).

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Federal Policy Update

An Overview of the Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security (CARES) Act

Both houses of the U.S. Congress passed a \$2 trillion package called the Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security (CARES) Act, the largest economic stimulus bill in the country's history. President Trump is expected to sign it. The main provisions will:

- Provide one-time payments of \$1,200, plus \$500 per child, to individuals who had an adjusted gross income of less than \$75,000 in 2019. Payments will be made, at a scaled rate, to individuals who made up to \$99,000.
- Provide \$100 billion in grants to the hospital industry to address immediate equipment and other needs and lost income due to the pandemic.
- Provide an additional \$600 per week to individuals who receive state unemployment benefits.
- Allow the U.S. Department of the Treasury to distribute \$500 billion to struggling industries (like airlines), cities and states. That includes \$8 billion for local governments losing tax revenue.

Importantly, the bill injects funding into the federal and state education systems through an Education Stabilization Fund of more than \$30 billion. The fund includes \$13.5 billion for elementary and secondary schools, \$14.25 billion for higher education, and \$3 billion for qualifying states to use to meet immediate needs as they "prevent, prepare for and respond to coronavirus." The bill encourages agencies, states and institutions that receive funds to continue to pay employees and contractors during school closures.

The bill divides the majority of monies in the Education Stabilization Fund into three main parts.

The Governor's Emergency Education Relief Fund (\$3 billion)

The U.S. Secretary of Education will make Emergency Education Relief grants to governors of states who apply and are approved for the funds. Funds will be allocated based on the population of people ages 5-24 years old and on the population of children ages 5-17 living in poverty or foster care. States can use funds to:

- award emergency grants to school districts and colleges most impacted;
- support education-related entities that carry out services for students;
- provide childcare and early childhood education services;
- provide social and emotional support; and
- protect education-related jobs.

Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund (\$13.5 billion)

Through an application process, the U.S. Secretary of Education will make emergency relief grants to state education agencies. Funds will be allocated based on Title I formulas in the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) that primarily calculate funding based on the number

and percentage of children living in poverty in the state. States must use the majority of funds to make subgrants to local education agencies (such as school districts) to help:

- Comply with the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act and the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act;
- Ensure a coordinated effort to prevent, prepare for and respond to COVID-19;
- Support school leaders to address the needs of their schools;
- Support the unique needs, including summer learning needs, of children in families with low incomes, students with disabilities, English learners, migrant students, students of color, students experiencing homelessness and students in the foster care system;
- Purchase technology to support "regular and substantive" online learning, including hardware, software and connectivity equipment;
- Provide mental health services and supports; and
- Plan and coordinate supports for students during school closures, including how to provide meals, provide technology for online learning, and ensure compliance with federal, state, and local laws.

Higher Education Emergency Relief Fund (\$14.25 billion)

The CARES Act allows the U.S. Secretary of Education to distribute funds to institutions of higher education (IHEs), including colleges and universities:

- Funds will be distributed to IHEs and apportioned by percentages of full-time students who receive Federal Pell Grants and are not exclusively in distance education courses. Additional funds will be distributed to schools specifically for coronavirus-related needs and to defray costs associated with school closures and other responses to the pandemic, including providing food, housing, course materials, healthcare, and childcare.
- IHEs can use the funds to cover costs associated with coronavirus-related changes to the delivery of instruction but must use at least half to provide emergency financial aid to students for expenses related to food, housing, course materials, healthcare, childcare and technology.

Additionally, the CARES Act allows people to defer federal student loan payments for six months without penalty or interest and waives Pell Grant attendance requirements. It also provides funding for cleaning and disinfecting schools, ensures access to school meal programs through funds for child nutrition programs, increases benefits for Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program (SNAP) recipients, and provides additional funding for childcare subsidies for families with low incomes.

While critical, the funding in the CARES Act is far less than what many advocates, education agencies, and institutions of higher education have identified they need to provide a robust and comprehensive response to the coronavirus and support the students and families most impacted. It is critical for communities to urge state education agencies and local school districts to spend new funds in equitable ways. Policymakers, administrators and educators must identify, prioritize and address the needs of students of color, students from families with low incomes, English learners, migrant students, and students with disabilities, among others, through effective supports, programs and equipment. Without proper spending and oversight, this new infusion of funds could simply exacerbate existing inequities between students.

Free Webinar Series



Equitable Practices for Teaching Online

This webinar helps teachers rethink their lesson plans for an online platform, including resources like teacher-created YouTube channels and explainer videos, tools for sharing resources with your peers, and ways of working with your district to ensure students have access.

[WATCH WEBINAR](#)



Digital Divide: Connectivity, Infrastructure and Devices

Get practical solutions to addressing the digital divide for your students. This webinar explores immediate and sustainable long-term strategies that preserve the integrity of district fiscal policies. Featuring presenters from the Federal Reserve Bank, Lit Communities, and IDRA.

[WATCH WEBINAR](#)

Next Webinar: Tools & Tips to Alleviate the Homework Gap

The homework gap is not a new problem. But with the move to system-wide distance learning, it's not just a homework gap any longer. This webinar presents ways to support students who do not have internet access or computer.

Tuesday, March 31, 2020 @ 2:00 pm (cst)

[REGISTER NOW](#)



COVID-19 Texas Policy Update

Texas Colleges Respond to COVID-19

In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, students entering or enrolled in college should be able to continue to pursue their education and stay up-to-date with their institution's changing policies. This edition of IDRA's Learning Goes On reviews responses from Texas colleges to

the spread of the COVID-19 virus.

What is the current status of Texas colleges and universities?

The Center for Disease Control issued [guidelines](#) for colleges to manage student residences, events, online courses and information-sharing. Each institution and its campuses separately determine of how to manage institutional responses to COVID-19. Colleges across the state have adjusted their spring schedules and, for many, this means extended spring breaks and transitions to online coursework, requirements for residential students to move off-campus, and canceled or postponed commencement ceremonies.

The majority of Texas colleges and universities closed campus offices through at least early April, if not through the end of the spring semester in May. Many transitioned to online-only instruction and have limited on-campus personnel. Several institutions canceled athletic events and student gatherings, and some canceled or postponed commencement ceremonies. Many colleges that offer study-abroad programs returned traveling students to the United States and canceled future abroad programs for the time being.

As information changes rapidly, so do institutional responses. Follow the most recent college and university responses on IDRA's new interactive dashboard (see below). The Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) also maintains a [webpage](#) with state and institutional updates.

How do federal and state changes to higher education guidelines impact college access and financial aid?

Students who plan to enroll in college should contact their school's admissions and financial aid offices for specific information. Deadlines, fees and scheduled summer enrollment and registration programs may change in response to the pandemic.

K-12 school districts and college counselors should still counsel graduating high school students to make progress toward postsecondary goals even if these vary by institution. The ACT and SAT [were moved](#) to late spring testing dates.

For high school students taking the Texas Success Initiative (TSI) Assessment for college and dual-credit enrollment, THECB encourages schools to offer the online exam option through College Board's testing platform, Examity.

The FAFSA deadline for the 2020-21 school year remains June 30, 2021, as is the Texas Application for State Financial Aid (TASFA). However, since the IRS extended the 2019 tax filing deadline to July 15, 2020, applicants should remember to update their tax information as it is available to ensure they can access any priority funds with accurate financial information.

The U.S. Department of Education announced suspension of required payments and collection actions on federal student loans for two months and that interest would not accrue on outstanding loans for 60 days, effective March 13, 2020. Colleges and universities may still pay students who receive Federal Work Study as part of their financial aid package even if all instruction and operations moved online but only if the changes pertain to the current term of aid. Texas waived regulations in order to allow the Texas College Work-Study Program to continue despite school closures and transitions to remote learning.

How do federal, state and institutional changes impact college students?

COVID-19 affects the academic, social-emotional health and financial livelihoods of college students.

Academic

Colleges and their students struggle with the digital divide. Many students rely on computers on campus to complete their work if they do not have access to their own computers. Faculty have varying levels of access to and training on web-based platforms. For campuses that already [suffered disparities](#) in online equipment and reliable internet access, campus closures in response to the virus exacerbate already inconsistent access to instructors and course material. Students with disabilities face additional challenges if they require special accommodations. Colleges must continue to provide instructional and other accommodations consistent with protections under Section 504, the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), and the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA).

Social-Emotional Health

Disruptions for students carry significant social, emotional and psychological impacts. For college students, particularly those who are low-income, [first-generation](#), [LGBTQ](#) students, and others who generally rely on their college for services (such as work placements, medical services, food and dining, residence, childcare), these transitions to off-campus and/or online instruction and living may be especially disruptive and cause distress, instability and trauma. Colleges should transition their mental health services to online support systems, if possible, and send frequent communications and resources to students and staff.

Financial

Many college students already face food insecurity, housing instability and financial hardship. Colleges often serve as full-service organizations for students through housing, work assignments, on-site childcare, medical and health services, dining services, recreation centers, and other facilities and benefits. Colleges should: make accessible via phone and online all of their student emergency and support services; provide access to meals for any local students and/or students residing on campus for special circumstances; and coordinate with local municipal offices and community organizations to identify alternative sources for essential student services and incorporate these in frequent institutional communications. Colleges should keep students' financial aid as consistent as possible based on their FAFSA and TASFA information, enrollment status and adjusted costs of attendance.

Links for more information

Center for Disease Control and Prevention: [Interim Guidance for Administrators of US Institutions of Higher Education](#)

FAFSA.gov [deadlines](#)

National Conference of State Legislatures: [Higher Education Responses to Coronavirus](#)

Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB): [Coronavirus Update for Higher Education](#)

THECB, Letter from Commissioner, January 31, 2020: [Coronavirus Information for Institutions of Higher Education](#)

THECB [Frequently Asked Questions on COVID-19](#)

The HOPE Center, March 16, 2020: [Beyond the Food Pantry - Supporting #RealCollege Students During COVID19](#)

U.S. Department of Education, March 20, 2020: [Press release on suspending federal student loans and waiving interest](#)

U.S. Department of Education: [Protecting Students with Disabilities](#)

Salesforce: [Resources for Education Institutions Navigating COVID-19](#)

Salesforce: [Connected Student Report - A higher education trends report with insights into the student experience across North America and Europe](#)

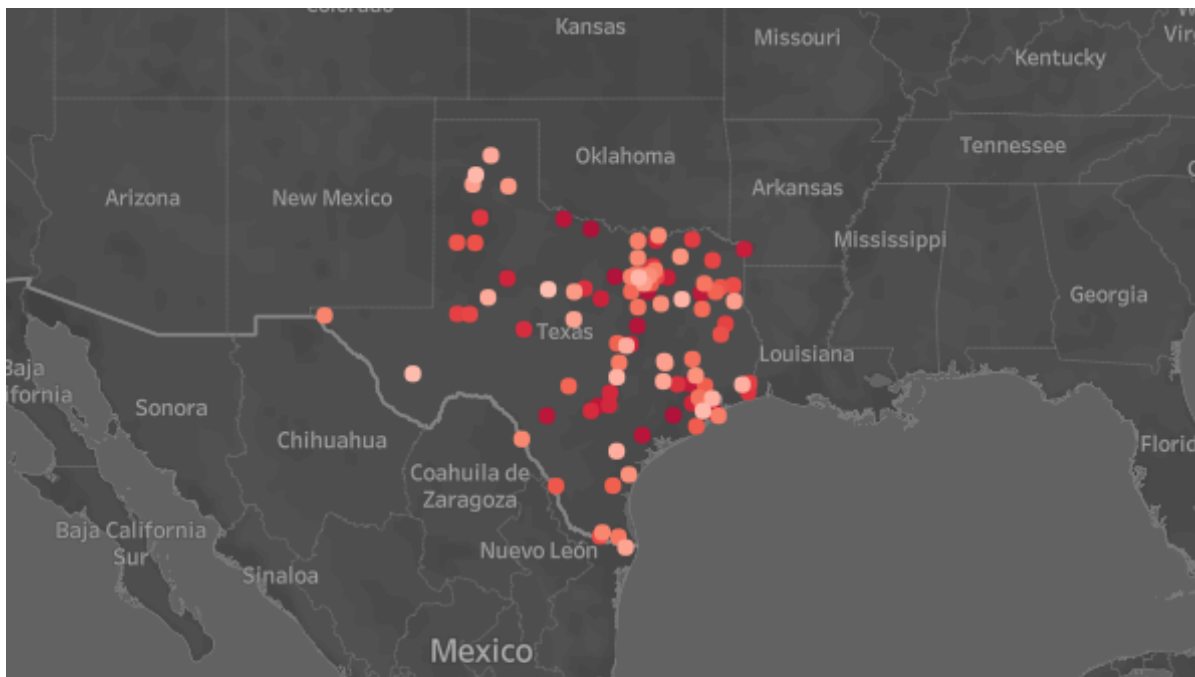
Ways Colleges Should Support their Students During this Time

- Maintain open, frequent and responsive communication with all members of the campus community about institutional responses, state updates, and federal policy changes to financial aid and loan repayments.
- Ensure that alumni, particularly recent graduates, also receive information about changes to loan repayment procedures.
- Consider permitting students with specific needs or who cannot relocate to remain in residential arrangements.
- Continue to provide dining services in modified arrangements for local students.
- Continue any university-provided health insurance coverage through the summer months, regardless of work or enrollment provisions. Make college health services available online and provide mental health resources to the campus community.
- Consider equitable internet access for faculty and students when deciding whether to modify or cancel instructional platforms for the remainder of the spring and summer semesters.
- Maintain federal and state protections for students under the ADA, Higher Education Act, and FERPA.

IDRA Releases New Interactive Data Map

COVID-19 Data Map - Texas College Responses

IDRA developed this data map showing information on colleges across Texas related to COVID-19. The information includes date of school closure, transition to online instruction and additional notes. The map draws on data from the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board. Since the data changes rapidly, students and faculty should contact their college directly for the most up-to-date information related to COVID-19.



City	Date Face-to-Face Classes Suspended	Shift to Online? (Y/N)	
Abilene	NA	Unknown	■
San Antonio	March 16-20	No	■
Universal City	March 16-20	No	■

SEE DATA MAP

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2020 Census

2020 Census Deadline Extended to August 14

Given the quickly changing developments with the spread of COVID-19, the U.S. Census Bureau expanded the timeframe for residents to complete the census form. Households may now complete the census form between March 12 and August 14.

You can complete the 2020 census form online, over the phone, or through U.S. mail.

If you're planning on completing the 2020 Census form online, please visit 2020census.gov to start the form.

Shape the next generation. Count them.

Respond to the 2020 Census and inform funding for educational programs that benefit our children, like after-school activities, school meal programs, and Head Start. It's more than just a count, it's an opportunity to shape the next generation.

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United States
Census 2020

Equity Resources for Online Learning



Issue Brief

Ensuring Equity in Online Learning – Considerations in Response to COVID-19's Impact on Schooling

In the wake of the COVID-19-propelled public health crisis, schools around the nation are turning to online learning for students. Technology presents a huge opportunity to engage students to continue their schooling.

However, online education also brings a host of equity and access concerns, misconceptions around students' technology abilities, and unique challenges for some student populations, including special education students and English learners.

This special edition issue brief provides educators ideas on how technology can best serve us during these times. The following suggestions rely on best educational practices, logical conclusions drawn from school district equity audits and classroom observations, research on technology access, and our collective empathy toward families and students.


Ensure Internet Access for Students

Online education does not work when students cannot access it. Many students do not have access to the internet, laptops or tablets necessary for full participation in online courses or activities. Pew Research Center analyzed 2013 U.S. Census Bureau data (PewRes, 2022a).

- 15% of households with school-aged children do not have a high-speed internet connection at home.
- One in four teens whose annual family income is less than \$30,000 does not have access to a home computer and
- 17% of teens often or sometimes are unable to do their homework due to a lack of access to a computer or the internet.

Many students do have access to the internet through their cell phones, but completing homework through the phone can be extremely difficult. While conference platforms like Zoom, Google Hangouts and online video streaming are the most interactive components of online education, they can burn through a phone data plan in one day, leaving many students to search for a Wi-Fi spot. Also, many students have no access to a printer.

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Best Practices for Online Instruction in the Wake of COVID-19

As schools across the country move to some form of online learning for students in response to COVID-19, there is great diversity in how schools are implementing their online programs. As a resource, IDRA has compiled this listing of researched-based strategies for K-12 students.

Set Up Educator Collaborations

Issues with implementing online classes can be shared by having teachers form groups and collaboratively develop the most effective ways to teach their students material online. Additionally, campus leaders and technology specialists should be consulted for teachers developing courses to help work through any technical issues and further software and process knowledge (Owen, et al., 2020). Teachers generally prefer on-site support for technology use in response to phone-based assistance, so in the context of social distancing requirements, online conferencing may provide the best alternative for in-person support.

Encourage Student Collaboration

Online courses provide the best outcomes when students encourage students to work together on understanding the content and meeting assignments (Ponemon Research, 2020). Collaborative assignments encourage further development of critical thinking and problem-solving skills. Additionally, sessions where large groups of students can speak and interact either via chat or in a breakout classroom setting, tend to work better for young learners (Owen, et al., 2020).

Focus on Active Learning

Even the most dynamic lecture can be less appealing in an online setting. Engaging students who are not in a room together should include a mix of small discussions, small group chats and projects, video and audio clips, and hands-on sessions with the text (Pan, 2021; Johnson, 2022; O'Malley, 2021). Best content delivery on discussion boards that engage learners (Lin & Zheng, 2021).

Use Multimedia for Young Learners

Students who are not reading material, or who may have difficulty navigating online classrooms designed for high school and college students, benefit from lessons that incorporate video and audio content (Owen, et al., 2020).

Break Lessons into Bite-size Chunks

Long lectures are not the best way to engage with students, especially online. Avoid pages and pages of text or an hour-long lecture. Work to break

down the information in 10-minute chunks that allow students to work with the material they have learned in smaller, active segments. Suggestions for "chunking" lessons also include designing lessons with single white space, breaking up text with photographs and examples, and incorporating color in any visual text sections (Owen, et al., 2020; O'Malley, 2021). Courses that are visually appealing are more engaging for students (Ponemon Research, 2020).

Maintain Continued Teacher Presence

It is vitally important that educators are mentally present for their students – not by simply responding to students' questions post-lesson, but by actively communicating with students (O'Malley, 2021; Beasley & Beck, 2021). Instructors should be aware of student progress. They complete assignments and continue to facilitate discussions and checks to make sure that learners are actively engaged (Pan, 2021; Ponemon Research, 2020).

Provide Individualized Education

If students are struggling or have special needs that cannot be met through a normal lesson, educators should take care to engage these students and deliver content in a way that best suits their needs (Ponemon Research, 2020). Successful educators create available data, use appropriate assessments for their students, and change instruction to suit unique needs (O'Malley, et al., 2020; Beasley & Beck, 2021).

Build Authentic Family Engagement

Online courses can make it difficult to gauge motivation and any potential issues a student may have with coursework. Educators should have a genuine relationship with their students' families and guardians to keep up motivation and ensure that students work through and complete assignments (Johnson, 2022).

Set Clear Communication Policies

Education and students should stay in touch, and the policies around responding to student or parent communications should be understood by all parties. For example, teachers can (Pan, 2021; Ponemon, 2020):

- Answer student emails within 24 hours.
- Initiate phone calls with each student at least once a month.
- Have weekly progress checks for each student.
- Actively solicit student feedback.
- Call parents or guardians at least once a month, and

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Equity Connection - IDRA's Free Online Community of Practice

Join IDRA's free online community of practice

IDRA's [Equity Connection](https://www.idra.org/equity-connection) is a place for educators, researchers, parents and community. We've added a forum focused on the COVID-19-propelled public health crisis and its affect on schooling.



IDRA Equity Connection

An online community for equity in education

www.idra.org/equity-connection

IDRA
Transforming Education

Online Technical Assistance Academies for School Districts

Get help implementing equitable and effective online education!

As schools shut down and head for uncertain times, IDRA is offering multi-day online academies to assist districts in providing equitable and excellent education in online settings. The academies will be held using a web conference platform easily available to your teachers and will consist of one planning day with district and campus leaders and four professional development and technical assistance days with instructional coaches and teachers. The cost ranges from \$10,000 to \$50,000 depending on district size and needs. Contact IDRA for more information:

contact@idra.org.



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March 27, 2020

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IDRA works hand-in-hand with hundreds of thousands of educators and families each year in communities and classrooms around the country. All our work rests on an unwavering commitment to creating self-renewing schools that value and promote the success of students of all backgrounds.