Distance Learning Policy

Guidance and Approval Process for

Requesting Additional Distance Learning

Days

September 2021

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Introduction

In 2017, the Governor signed a bill into law requiring that the Rhode Island Department of Education ("RIDE") establish a policy that allows Local Education Agencies ("LEAs") to submit a plan if their schools intend to conduct distance learning when schools need to close due to inclement weather or other emergencies. Additionally, the pandemic forced

schools to implement instruction via distance learning beginning in April 2019. Since that time period, our statewide calendar paired distance learning days with teacher professional learning days. These opportunities allowed RIDE and LEAs to refine their distance learning practices and expectations. This policy contains guidance and information about the components necessary if an LEA would like approval for additional distance learning days (pre-determined days paired with staff professional development and/or days to be used if schools need to close due to inclement weather or other unanticipated emergencies). For more details, read the [full legislation](#).

Objectives

- Provide LEAs with expectations and guidance for planned and unplanned
  distance learning days in regards to instruction, special considerations, and
  attendance to allow for consistent, high quality learning experiences for our

students on these days.
- Outline the plan components and approval process for distance learning days.

*LEAs must create a plan for RIDE approval if they intend on using any more than **four** professional learning days as distance learning days. Additionally, LEAs are only able to request **up to five** additional distance learning days for approval (not including days needed for quarantine, quarantine days must meet this criteria to count for a school day); which includes those being paired with professional learning days AND those that may be used for emergency building closures (Ex. inclement weather, power outage).*

Planning

What types of distance learning days need to be included in the plan for approval?

Type of distance learning day	Does it need approval?
I plan on holding distance learning days during the four professional learning days outlined on the RIDE statewide calendar.	No
I moved my four professional learning days to dates different than the RIDE statewide calendar days and would like to have these four days serve as distance learning days.	No
I have more than four professional learning days built in to my calendar and would like to use more than four of them as distance learning days.	Yes – LEAs must create a plan for approval if they are requesting any more than 4 distance learning days.

I would like to have the option to implement distance learning days when emergency building closures are necessary.	Yes – LEAs must create a plan for approval if they are requesting possible inclement weather distance learning days.

NOTE: No more than 5 additional distance learning days can be requested per school year (not including days needed for quarantine). Quarantine days must meet this criteria to count for a school day.

Planning Team

LEAs should create or utilize a team comprised of various stakeholders (central office administrators, principals, teachers, parents, students) to create their plan. This will allow for a plan that is both realistic and meaningful for all involved.

Instructional Considerations

Plans may wish to include distance learning instruction and learning tasks that are both synchronous and asynchronous (examples below). They must include plans for asynchronous learning if distance learning days are being requested for emergency building closures as these days are more likely to be used unexpectedly and may involve power outages and limited or no access to technology. Schools should refer to the Developing Norms for Distance Learning, Distance Learning Best Practices, and Early Learning Curriculum and Best Practice Consideration documents for additional resources.

Synchronous	Asynchronous

For two-way communication and interaction that happens in real time:	One-way communication where feedback can be provided after the fact or no feedback is needed:
• Live instruction • Breakout groups/Live discussion • Polling your audience • Live assessments of mastery—can be 1- on-1 or small groups with breakout rooms • Drop-in time with a teacher for students who have questions or need additional assistance	• A short lesson previously recorded by the teacher • An instructional video paired with an assignment • Short presentations given by students that can be viewed at a later time • Posted assignments that are completed by students and uploaded for teacher feedback • Paper/pencil task or project assigned prior to the distance learning day

Care should be taken when planning for instruction on distance learning days. Unscheduled distance learning days are not the best time for instruction on a new idea or concept, but may be better used to reinforce previously learned concepts or for independent work, including reading or research.

RIDE recommends that districts and schools make the following considerations for all learners:

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• Consideration should be given to the amount of screen time compared to assignments that can be completed without the use of a computer or other device. This will vary depending on students' ages and level of independence.

• Teachers should be aware of any students that do not have access to an appropriate device or internet access and should plan accordingly. For example, schools may wish to provide students with access to school devices and/or hot spots.

• Any technology that is used should be with programs that students know and with which they have some familiarity with. Teachers should be sure that students know how to log on and access programs for video conferencing or for

instruction.

- In advance and at the beginning of the year, teachers should work collaboratively to create distance learning day lessons and plans. Service providers need to coordinate services and instruction that will be provided to each student according to their individual needs and family situation for distance learning days.

Special Considerations

Plans must include how schools will explicitly plan for the student populations outlined below.

Differently-abled Students

In addition to the general considerations listed above, every LEA must ensure that students with Individual Education Programs (IEPs) and 504 Plans receive appropriate services and accommodations during distance learning days. Each LEA is required and held accountable for the delivery of FAPE to students with IEPs. This shall remain in effect during distance learning days. The delivery of services on these days may vary based upon a student's individual needs and what is stated in an IEP or 504 Plan. Service providers should be involved in created distance learning day plans for this population of students. Service providers need to coordinate services and instruction that will be provided to each student according to their individual needs and family

situation for distance learning days. Transparency and communication with families of differently-abled students are critical to ensuring they are involved in the process as the implementation of an IEP or 504 Plan may look different during distance learning.

Schools should also consider:
- Allowing for and providing multiple modes of expression to students for sharing ideas, listening/reading/communicating.
- Providing scaffolding such as frameworks or sentence starters.
- Giving students a virtual partner to share ideas and models with. •
Recording lessons to and allow students to view as many times as needed.

Multi-lingual Learners

In addition to the general considerations listed above, every LEA should ensure that their distance learning plan provides multi-lingual learners (MLLs), English learners (ELs), and former ELs with targeted instruction in English and the appropriate amount of supports in their home language during distance learning days. Instruction should support English language development and grade-level content learning, as well as provide supports in the student's home language when possible. Plans should include how teachers will leverage embedded support features within technology platforms or tools to facilitate MLL/EL learning.

As schools plan for the continuation ELD services on distance learning days, they should consider:

- Students' specific strengths and needs, such as current level of proficiency in English and their home language literacy.
- Which academic areas should have more extension activities versus those where the student may need the most support.
- Meaningful access to academic content; which includes language objectives, scaffolds, and visual supports.
- How teachers can provide multiple representations of concepts and provide vocabulary instruction, in addition to directly sharing the purpose of learning utilizing all available online resources in academic and home languages to support content learning.
- Engage support staff and community members in creating translations of materials.
- Support student-student discourse using technology if possible.

- Allow students to dictate or video record responses for activities. •
Use a platform like YouTube that has captioning options.
- Lightening the technological load by establishing routines and carefully selecting the digital tools students and/or their families already know and use. Online platforms should be accessible for multi-lingual learners to navigate with the help of visual or written modeled instruction or steps for guidance. Instructions should be translated to allow multilingual families to support students. Paper versions of multi-lingual resources should be offered where instruction may be hindered by technology access. Staff should

communicate with students and families to ensure there is access to an appropriate device, the internet and that there is enough bandwidth to support programs and video conferencing. Staff should also consider the family comfort level with the technology.

Finally, the LEA must address multi-lingual learners that are differently-abled. In advance and at the beginning of the year, general education teachers, special education teachers and ESL teachers should develop a plan for the delivery of services to students during distance learning days. Service providers need to coordinate services and instruction that will be provided to each student according to their individual needs and family situation for distance learning days.

Attendance

Plans must include how attendance will be measured on distance learning days. •
Attendance procedures can include asynchronous and/or synchronous methods. Examples include:
- o Synchronous: Taking attendance at a given time or times (such as the start and/or end of the day).
- o Asynchronous: Submission of the work either at the close of the day or the next day the student is back in-person.
- • Asynchronous attendance methods are especially important for days in which the school has a distance learning day due to emergency school closures. Consider connecting attendance with the completion of assigned tasks from the distance learning day even if attendance is taken synchronously.

- • LEAs/schools should communicate the expectations and procedures for attendance to their educators, families, and students prior to implementing a distance learning day.
- • LEAs should work to ensure all educators implement attendance procedures consistently.

Communications

Plans must include how the LEA and school will communicate their plan to their staff, students, families and community.

- Distance learning days that are being paired with professional development days should be noted as such on the LEA and school calendar. LEAs requesting these types of distance learning days will be asked to submit their SY21 calendar with their plan.

- School staff should communicate with students and parents as early as possible in the school year and far ahead of the time when distance learning might take place so teachers, support personnel, parents and students know what to expect when a distance learning day is announced. Reminders should be sent out as the school year progresses and the chances for inclement weather increases.

- Families should have access to information about distance learning in a language they understand. Families should be connected with interpretation services and/or specific personnel within the district (for example family liaisons or trained bilingual staff) who can provide interpretation services. LEAs should make all possible translations and interpretation services available to families, some services can be found at the RIDE website.

Approval Process

1. LEAs complete their Distance Learning Plan.
2. LEAs complete the Request for Additional Distance Learning Days form (pg. 11) and submit to info@ride.ri.gov for approval.

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3. RIDE provides feedback on the attached document. If all required components are in place, RIDE approves plan. If there are required components missing or incomplete, RIDE provides feedback so the LEA can revise their plan accordingly and resubmit.
4. LEA posts approved plan on website and communicates the plan to their stakeholders and community.

Request for Additional Distance Learning Days

LEA Name: **North Providence**

Point of Contact: **Joseph B. Goho, Superintendent**

Email Address: joseph.goho@npsd.k12.ri.us

Phone Number: 401-233-100

Types of additional distance learning days being requested for approval. As a reminder, LEAs can only seek approval for no more than 5 additional distance learning days (not including days needed for quarantine. Quarantine days must meet this criteria to count for a school day).

1) More than four distance learning days that will be paired with educator professional learning days:

◆◆ Yes – *Please indicate which days will be professional learning/distance learning days*:

◆◆ No

AND/OR

2) Distance learning days that will be used, if needed, for emergency school closures due to inclement weather or other unexpected emergencies: *(For a Total of 5 Days if needed)*
◆◆ Yes
◆◆ No

Assurances

Instructions: Provide assurances by marking an "X" in each box next to each item to demonstrate that you have incorporated it into your plan.

X	*Utilized a planning team or representative group of stakeholders to create our plan.*
X	*Our plan includes a description of the instruction that will be provided on each of our distance learning days.*

X	*Develop a plan to revisit students' Individualized Education Plans, 504 plans, and multi-lingual learner services specific to distance learning days in partnership with teachers and parents to reflect evolving needs.*
X	*Ensure that all students have access to the technology necessary to access and complete distance learning tasks.*
X	*Approved plans will be posted on the LEA webpage.*
X	*LEA calendar is included in plan with distance learning days clearly identified (if they are to be paired with professional learning days). As a reminder, calendars should also be included with this document for the approval process.*
X	*LEA calendar will be updated as distance learning days as used.*

Explanations

Instructions: Complete the following fields with narratives or attach/link to relevant documents or artifacts.

Please see [North Providence Distance/Virtual Learning Plan for 2021-2022](#)

1. Describe the type of learning that will be occurring on your distance learning days (synchronous, asynchronous, or a combination). As a reminder, if you are requesting distance learning days to be used during inclement weather or other emergency situations, your plan must include how students will receive asynchronous instruction on these days.

> ***Please see North Providence Distance/Virtual Learning Plan for 2021- 2022 linked above for further details. Please see links below for typical schedules and expectations for students, families, and teachers.***
>
> *It should be noted that this plan supports all models of Distance/Virtual Learning - Full DL, Partial and/or Limited.* Distance/Virtual Instructional Days will be used to maintain the momentum of learning, minimizing the interruptions caused by emergency and/or inclement weather days. Providing opportunities for virtual instruction not only supports the district's ongoing focus on integrating technology into instruction but also provides more effective instruction than days that are added to the end of the school year.
>
> When necessary due to an emergency and/or inclement weather, students will not report to school due but will engage in learning activities using digital resources and/or paper-based assignments made available to them before the beginning of the out of school time or digitally. Students will engage with all classes scheduled on that day (including specials.) There is no set "seat time" - students complete work according to a typical schedule and individual ability. However, there will be a suggested schedule at all levels. We also have SEL check-ins for all students at all levels. (See Below)
>
> *Highlights from each level regarding Asynchronous and Synchronous Instruction: (See below sample schedules, expectations, roles and responsibilities)*
>
> *Elementary*:
>
> 1. Teachers will post assignments to their existing Google Classrooms or Class Dojo.
>
> 2. Teachers will also support students through direct instruction using Google Meets.

Middle:

1. Teachers will post assignments to their existing Google classrooms for asynchronous learning.
2. Some teachers will utilize a Google meet to instruct their classroom at the specific class meeting time of the calendar rotation. This will be posted in the team email as well as conveyed to the students in the morning advisory.
3. Each team has a listserv specific to the students they serve, to be able to send out a mass communication outlining the day's activities.

High:

1. Teachers use Google Form attendance documents to have students check-in. Some might use a question of the day everyone has to answer as what they count for attendance. Either way, teachers ask for first period students to complete this within the first fifteen minutes of the day so the DAY'S attendance can be recorded appropriately.
2. Teachers have tasks running throughout the week and engage through online posted assignments, tasks, activities. Teachers are available through e-mail and online Google Meets.

Grades K - 5 Suggested Distance/Virtual Learning Schedule
Grades K - 5 Distance/Virtual Learning Roles/Responsibilities/Expectations
Secondary Grades - Examples of Full and Hybrid Distance/Virtual Learning Schedules
Secondary Grades - Distance/Virtual Learning - Roles/Responsibilities/Expectations
North Providence Distance/Virtual Learning Teacher Expectations
Elementary SEL Check-In
Middle School SEL Check-In
NPHS SEL Check-In

2. Describe how your plan explicitly supports the instructional needs of multilingual learners, differently-abled students, and any other student population in need of additional consideration.

Instruction will be provided through Google Classroom/Google Suite. All teachers, including itinerants, MLL Teachers, and Special Educators, will develop and implement standards-based lessons for Virtual Instructional Days. Related Service providers and teachers will ensure that individual supports, services, and accommodations for students with an Individual Education Program (IEP), Individual Learning Plan (ILP), or a Section 504 Plan are available.

Special Educators will make the necessary accommodations and modifications for students with IEPs. Accommodations may include changes in the following: presentation of a lesson, instructional strategies, student response format and procedures, time/scheduling, and/or assignment structure. Modifications are the changes made to provide a student with opportunities to participate meaningfully and productively. Modifications may include changes in instructional level, content/curriculum, and/or performance criteria.

We are aware that some students, the ones with the most significant disabilities, may require flexibility and creativity in collaboration with family support on the Virtual Days. The district will provide a combination of supportive lessons, engaging activities, and services that have been individualized per student's needs.

During Virtual Instruction Days, students will be supported by Related Service providers, Paraprofessionals, Behavior Specialists, Special Educators, Support Staff, and General Educators. Individual supports, services, and accommodations for students with an Individual Education Program (IEP), Individual Learning Plan (ILP), or a Section 504 Plan are reviewed, discussed, and agreed upon at the student's annual meeting, a Section 504 meeting, or general education plan meeting.

All North Providence students have access to a number of technical solutions required for modification and/or accommodations during Virtual Instruction Days via accessibility features built-in on Chromebooks and other computer devices such as on-screen keyboards, enlarged fonts, audio, etc. Chrome users have access to apps and extensions such as Read and Write for Google Chrome, Equatio, text to speech tools, zoom tools, and Google Translate are available for accessibility use.

Accessibility features are built into our devices (if the student has one of our school district Chromebooks at home) and information on how to access and use them is included in both our Employee Guidance Document and our Frequently Asked Questions Document. Parents and students may contact their teachers through email or through the Virtual Instructional Days Information email virtuallearning@npsd.k12.ri.us

3.. Describe how attendance will be determined on distance learning days.

General Procedure: Attendance is taken through Google Classrooms and/or Class Dojo each Distance/Virtual Learning day. This attendance is sent to the school secretary and principal to be entered into our Skyward Student Information System.

Elementary Schools: Attendance is taken through Google Classrooms and/or Class Dojo each Distance/Virtual Learning day. This attendance is sent to the school secretary and principal to be entered into our Skyward Student Information System.

Middle Schools: Attendance will be taken during morning advisory. Attendance will also be taken each class period. If a student is marked absent for morning advisory but attends at least 4 out of his or her classes the absence will be changed to present.

High School: Teachers use [Google Form attendance documents](#) to have students check-in. Some might use a question of the day everyone has to answer as what they count for attendance. Either way, teachers ask for first period students to complete this within the first fifteen minutes of the day so the DAY'S attendance can be recorded appropriately.

4. Describe how your plan will be communicated with all necessary stakeholder groups (staff, families, students, community members).

The plan for participation in Virtual Instructional Days will be communicated to staff, students, and parents through multiple means including a Frequently Asked Questions document for parents and students and an Employee Guidance Document for faculty and staff.

We will be sharing our revised plan to our School Committee and our community in fall, 2021. In addition, once reviewed and approved by RIDE, we will repost the plan on our district website. A letter will be sent home to all families regarding the plan and future District PD days and possible Distance/Virtual Learning days. Inclement weather cancellations/emergency closure and the announcement of a Virtual Instructional Day(s) will be relayed through the school's notification phone & email system, district website, and local TV/radio stations.