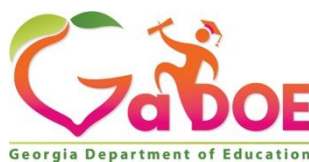


2019-2020

State Board of Education Waivers for Local Education Agencies

Responding to the COVID-19 Pandemic



March 31, 2020



The COVID-19 pandemic is presenting unprecedented challenges in Georgia, across the country, and around the world. The Georgia Department of Education (GaDOE) has worked in earnest to provide maximum flexibility to districts to allow them to focus on the safety and health of their students and staff during this time.

State School Superintendent Richard Woods suspended state-mandated testing, teacher/leader evaluation reporting and requirements, and attendance reporting and requirements; secured approval of assessment and accountability waivers from the U.S. Department of Education; recommended a package of waivers for approval by the State Board of Education (SBOE) to support school districts as they navigate the impacts of school closures and impending re-openings; and worked with Governor Kemp to obtain an Executive Order for the suspension of state laws that could not be waived by the SBOE.

The GaDOE is committed to working with our districts and schools as we maneuver this uncharted territory. We are making every effort to take into consideration the magnitude of the pandemic and the affect that it has had, and will have, on the lives of our students, families, and educators. We have included guidance below to help you understand some of the waivers that we have been approved at this time, and we maintain additional guidance on our website (www.gadoe.org/coronavirus).

As districts work to establish their guidelines, please remember to consider it is critical they **ensure that students are not penalized for circumstances over which they had no control. Students should not be held back in their expected progression – graduation, advancement to the next grade, etc. – as a result of the COVID-19 school closures**; the state has granted the necessary flexibility to make this possible. Additional guidance from GaDOE is below.

Assessment and Accountability

The following waivers were approved related to assessments:

- **Promotion and Retention:** O.C.G.A. §§ 20-2-283, 20-2-284; SBOE Rule 160-4-2-.11
Flexibility allows districts to waive, modify, or set promotion/retention criteria, as well as protocols for making placement decisions in a timely manner
- **Statewide Passing Score:** SBOE Rule 160-4-2-.13(2)(d) and (f)
Flexibility waives the requirement that the Georgia Milestones End-of-Course (EOC) assessment shall be used as the final exam in the courses assessed by a Georgia Milestones EOC and waives the requirement that the numeric score on the Georgia Milestones EOC shall count for 20% of the student's final numeric grade in the course assessed by the Georgia Milestones EOC.
- **Student Assessments:** O.C.G.A. §20-2-281; SBOE Rule 160-3-1-.07
Flexibility waives the administration of, and related requirements for, state assessments scheduled for late Spring 2020 administration.

1. Which assessments are included in the declaration to cancel all spring 2020 assessments?

All state-required spring testing windows, including GKIDS 2.0, GAA 2.0, Georgia Milestones EOG and EOC, and NAEP assessments, are cancelled. The Georgia Department of Education has received a waiver for this year's federal testing and accountability requirements from the U.S. Department of Education. Window #4 of the Keenville Linking Study is also cancelled. ACCESS for ELs was not impacted as ACCESS testing was completed prior to the impact of COVID-19 in Georgia.

2. How will school closures and the cancellation of spring assessments impact the CCRPI?

The Georgia Department of Education has applied for a waiver and received approval from the U.S. Department of Education to waive federal assessment and accountability requirements. **Therefore, there will not be a 2019-2020 CCRPI.**

3. Given the SBOE-approved waiver of the 20% EOC requirement, what should be used in lieu of the EOC score for students' final grades?

It is a local district's decision regarding how to calculate final student grades without an EOC score, allowing districts to utilize performance on class assignments, activities, projects, etc. to be used to generate final course grade. With the removal of the EOCs, students are not required by the state to take a local assessment in its place to complete the course or generate a course grade.

Decisions to administer local assessments are solely made by local districts. Superintendent Woods strongly encourages districts to suspend local assessments, in line with recent federal and state actions to suspend high-stakes testing.

4. Will there be an EOG Summer Retest opportunity in summer 2020 to address issues of promotion, placement, and retention?

Given the cancellation of the spring 2020 EOG testing window and the SBOE's approval of a waiver to the promotion, placement, and retention requirement, **there will not be a summer EOG retest window in summer 2020**. Local districts will make determinations of promotion, placement, and retention according to local policy that utilizes information other than Georgia Milestones scores.

5. Should EOC scores from the March 2020 mid-month administration be used in students' grades?

Districts may have experienced an impact of COVID-19 during the March 2020 EOC mid-month administration. For complete test sessions, districts can determine whether to include the EOC score in students' final course grades. For incomplete test sessions, districts should determine how to calculate students' final course grades without an EOC score. Incomplete test sessions and other irregularities should be reported to GaDOE through the MyGaDOE portal, consistent with existing procedures

6. Are districts allowed to continue to use GKIDS for progress reports or report cards?

Though GKIDS administration is suspended for 2019-2020, districts may choose to add any collected data to the GKIDS platform to allow for the production of any progress reports or report cards. Individual and summary reports will remain accessible in the platform for the duration of the school year. No additional assessment of students is expected under the cancellation for spring 2020.

7. Is Keenville still available in spring 2020?

Yes, Keenville is available to all Georgia 1st and 2nd grade students through the Statewide Longitudinal Data System (SLDS). For additional information, please contact Lisa Hardman at lhardman@doe.k12.ga.us.

8. Will the GaDOE require the administration of End of Pathway Assessments (EOPA)?

The state will not require the administration of EOPAs this school year. If a district returns to normal operations and time is available to administer EOPAs, this may be offered as an option for students who wish to take them to earn a credential before graduating. Districts should not require that all students take them. Additional information was sent to district CTAE directors and school counselors from the GaDOE CTAE Office.

Grading and Graduation Requirements

The following waivers were approved related to graduation requirements:

- **Graduation Requirements and Seat Time:** SBOE Rule 160-4-2-.48(6)(i)
Flexibility allows districts to award credit for course completion upon mastery of course standards at any time during the semester and waives the clock hour requirements for students to earn a Carnegie Unit of credit during the regular school year and for summer schools. Flexibility also allows for the substitution of equivalent or higher-level requirements.
- **Promotion and Retention:** O.C.G.A. §§ 20-2-283, 20-2-284; SBOE Rule 160-4-2-.11
Flexibility allows districts to waive, modify, or set promotion/retention criteria, as well as protocols for making placement decisions in a timely manner.
- **Statewide Passing Score:** SBOE Rule 160-4-2-.13(2)(d) and (f)
Flexibility waives the requirement that the Georgia Milestones End-of-Course (EOC) assessment shall be used as the final exam in the courses assessed by a Georgia Milestones EOC and waives the requirement that the numeric score on the Georgia Milestones EOC shall count for 20% of the student's final numeric grade in the course assessed by the Georgia Milestones EOC.
- **Student Assessments:** O.C.G.A. §20-2-281; SBOE Rule 160-3-1-.07
Flexibility waives the administration of, and related requirements for, state assessments scheduled for late Spring 2020 administration.

1. What should be used to determine course completion and students' final grades?

It is a local district's decision regarding how to calculate final student grades.

Each local board of education is required to establish 70 as the minimum passing score for all subjects/courses taught in grades 4-12 in the public schools of the state; each school containing grade 9-12 shall record and maintain numerical grades of students in all courses for which credit is given in those courses; and if letter grades instead of numerical grades are given in grades 4-8, the local board of education shall determine the relationship of letter grades to the numerical passing score of 70.

Working within those parameters, local districts will determine the requirements for content mastery, course completion, and final grades for their students.

Georgia has canceled all state-mandated assessments for spring 2020 and waived the requirement that 20% of End-of-Course (EOC) assessments count toward students' final grades in EOC courses for spring 2020, allowing districts to utilize performance on class assignments, activities, projects, etc. to be used to generate final course grade. With the removal of the EOCs, students are not required by the state to take a local assessment in its place to complete the course or generate a course grade. Decisions to administer local assessments are solely made by local districts. Superintendent Woods strongly encourages districts to suspend local assessments, in line with recent federal and state actions to suspend high-stakes testing.

Considerations and strategies for course completion and grading are included in the table below.

Distance/Remote Learning Approaches¹

¹ These approaches and strategies are provided for district discussion and consideration. The Georgia Department of Education does not mandate specific approaches or strategies.

The Georgia Department of Education (GaDOE) strongly encourages districts to be sensitive about the realities students and staff are dealing with, including but not limited to challenges accessing devices/internet connectivity, caring for siblings/loved ones, and other roles/responsibilities during the COVID-19 pandemic.

<i>District-adopted Approaches</i>	<i>Expectations During Mandated School Closures</i>	<i>District Considerations</i>
Limited Instruction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Educators curate and/or share learning activities for families and students • Families participate in learning activities with their child(ren) and/or students direct their own learning with very limited or no direct instruction provided by educators 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Districts should ensure these limited instructional opportunities do not adversely impact students' grades/completed courses
Supplemental Instruction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Educators provide targeted direct instruction and/or periodic virtual/phone check-ins for their students • Instructional delivery focuses on remediation, reinforcement, and/or enrichment of key skills/concepts • Students are given the opportunity to make up missed/unfinished assignments or projects, complete practice assignments, and/or participate in activities that reinforce or preview key skills/concepts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Districts should consider how these instructional opportunities (i.e. graded assignments, allowing students to redo/resubmit assignments) can be leveraged to assist, not penalize, students academically
Wholesale Instruction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Educators are regularly providing direct instruction to students via an online learning platform, routine delivery/collection of learning packets, and/or regular virtual check-ins/lessons • Students routinely engage with their teachers, instructional materials, lessons, and assignments • Consistent implementation and application across specific grade-levels/courses, clusters, and/or district-wide with high levels of student engagement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Districts should set clear, realistic, and attainable academic expectations (i.e. appropriate amount of time spent on assignments, realistic number of graded assignments, allowing students to redo/resubmit assignments) for all students participating in distance learning opportunities

Course Completion/Grading Strategies¹

- Adopting a 'no zero' policy for all assignments, since school closures began, with students allowed to attempt an assignment multiple times, as needed
- Allowing students to redo, resubmit, and/or retake assignments
- Assigning students ungraded and/or 'complete'/'did not complete' activities that remediate, reinforce, or provide enrichment opportunities
- Prioritizing seniors, K-3 learners, and at-risk student populations (including students with disabilities²) for direct instruction and supports
- Evaluating key content and competencies taught prior to school closures to establish a 'cut off point' for grades/assignments and a benchmark for measuring course completion and performance

² If districts offer instruction, they must ensure it's accessible to students with disabilities; see USED's guidance '[Addressing the Risk of COVID-19 in Preschool, Elementary and Secondary Schools While Serving Children with Disabilities](#)'

2. How will decisions be made regarding Promotion and Retention?

Decisions on the promotion and retention of students are made by the local district. The cancelation of state assessments for spring 2020, along with the waiver of State Board of Education (SBOE) Rule 160-4-2-.11 PROMOTION, PLACEMENT, AND RETENTION eliminate the requirement to use state-adopted assessments in the determination of promotion and retention decisions.

Each local board was previously required to have a promotion and retention policy in place by July 1, 2003. The waiver of SBOE Rule 160-4-2-.11 grants districts the flexibility to utilize the current local policy they have in place (without the state-assessment consideration) or to modify or set promotion and retention criteria to address the needs of their students.

Districts can promote students who have demonstrated subject area competency, as determined by the district, without regard to the amount of time the student spent in the course.

Some considerations

Districts are afforded the flexibility to follow their own or set a new policy for promoting or retaining students, which could include but is not limited to:

- Utilizing course grades and performance in the course (either prior to the start of mandated school closures or over the course of the entire semester or school year – see *Distance Learning Approaches table*)
- Interviewing teachers and/or parents
- Evaluating prior performance on formative measures*

* *Decisions to administer local assessments are solely made by local districts.*

Superintendent Woods strongly encourages districts to suspend local assessments, in line with recent federal and state actions to suspend high-stakes testing.

3. How will graduation requirements for graduating seniors be affected by school closures?

Georgia high school students are required to complete a minimum of 23 credits to graduate. Each local board of education is required to establish 70 as the minimum passing score for all subjects/courses taught in grades 4-12 in the public schools of the state. Additionally, each school containing grades 9-12 shall record and maintain numerical grades of students in all courses for which credit is given in those courses.

Working within those parameters, local districts will determine the requirements for content mastery and course completion for high school seniors who were enrolled in credit-earning courses or their equivalent at the time of school closure. **High school seniors should not be penalized for circumstances beyond their control due to the COVID-19 pandemic.**

Districts may award course credit to students who have demonstrated subject area competency, as determined by the district, without regard to the amount of time the student spent in the course.

4. How will student grades be recorded on transcripts and what effect will this have on college admissions?

Student grades provided for the completion of courses, as determined by the local district, should be included on students' transcripts.

Each local district is still required to establish 70 as the minimum passing score for all subjects/courses taught in grades 4-12.

5. What effect will this have on college admission?

College admission decisions for colleges and universities in the state of Georgia are determined by the University System of Georgia (USG) and the Technical College System of Georgia (TCSG), respectively. Admission decisions for colleges outside of Georgia are determined by the governing authority in that state.

We are collaborating with the University System of Georgia, Technical College System of Georgia, Georgia Student Finance Commission, and others to ensure graduating seniors are not penalized due to the COVID-19 closures. At this time, we know that:

- TCSG is suspending placement exam requirements for admission to summer and fall 2020 classes. The system is also suspending the requirement to submit a high school transcript or equivalency transcript in addition to waiving the requirement that students must submit scores on the ACCUPLACER exam.
- USG has adjusted admissions requirements for its institutions in response to the cancelation of spring SAT and ACT testing dates. Prospective students applying for admission in fall 2020 will not be required to submit an ACT or SAT score. A student who has scores is still free to submit them, and the institution is free to utilize those scores to decide admission in the established way. Prospective first year students must meet all other admission requirements, including satisfactory completion of the required high school curriculum and all other requested documentation. Additional details are included in the [Adjustments to USG Admissions due to SAT ACT Cancelation](#) guidance provided by USG.

6. How will school closures impact students' eligibility for HOPE or Zell Miller Scholarship?

Determinations for Hope Scholarship and/or Zell Miller Scholarships are made by the Georgia Student Finance Commission (GSFC). GaDOE continues to work with the GSFC on identifying potential impacts on HOPE/Zell Miller Scholarship eligibility for the Class of 2020. For more information, please visit www.GAfutures.org (see COVID-19 Update).

7. What are the effects of school closures on Dual Enrollment students?

Colleges and universities with the University System of Georgia (USG) and the Technical College System of Georgia (TCSG) are working with their respective school districts to help shift high school students currently enrolled in Dual Enrollment courses to on-line instruction in those courses. High School Coordinators at the technical colleges are working with their respective school districts to move towards on-line classes.

Credit for Dual Enrollment courses are determined by the college or university that the student attends. Students who complete Dual Enrollment course requirements will receive credit, as determined by their local college or university.

The GaDOE is working with USG and TCSG to get updates on Dual Enrollment options for students. GaDOE is also working with state agencies and community organizations to provide supports with digital resources and internet access.

8. How should districts make decisions regarding graduation ceremonies?

School districts should follow the guidance of the Centers for Disease Control and the Department of Public Health for any decisions on public gatherings or meetings. The COVID-19 crisis is an ever-evolving situation. Districts may choose to graduate and issue diplomas to seniors as planned but opt to hold formal ceremonies in the summer or at a later date, if necessary.

Credit Recovery

Seniors, at-risk students, or any other students can immediately transfer into Georgia Virtual School at any time for the remainder of the semester. Even though the Georgia Virtual School cannot and does not award a diploma, all the student's work is transferred back to their home LEA and the student can then graduate from his/her school. For more information, contact Kristen Shepherd (kristen.shepherd@gavirtualschool.org).

Counseling

The following waivers were approved related to counseling:

- **Career Education: SBOE Rule 160-4-8-.08**
Flexibility allows districts to revise their advisement schedules to meet student priority needs.
- **Eighth Grade Graduation Plans: O.C.G.A. §20-2-327(c)**
Flexibility allows districts to waive the requirements and timelines for eighth grade graduation plans and to develop plans and timelines for completing these requirements for this cohort of students during the 2020-2021 school year.

1. Are schools required to complete advisement and graduation plan requirements during school closures?

Career education timelines have been suspended for the remainder of the 2019-2020 school year. **Districts are not required to develop individual graduation plans for eighth grade students or complete requirements related to annual student advisement sessions for students in grades 9-12 for the 2019-2020 school year.** Current eighth grade students that have not developed an individual graduation plan will need to develop a plan before the completion of their ninth-grade year (2020-2021 school year).

Some Considerations:

- Districts may choose to share with students in grades 6-12 (via paper or electronically) information regarding career awareness, career interest and career demand inventories, as well as information to assist students in the evaluation of their academic skills, career-oriented aptitudes, and career interests.
- Districts may choose to share with students ways they can prepare for a seamless transition to postsecondary study, further training, or employment. Information can be shared regarding occupations, degrees, industry credentials, certifications, and technical skills, as well as the work-ready skills in demand by Georgia employers found on the career pipeline website (<http://gacareerpipeline.gadoe.org/>) or through career aptitude assessment results, such as YouScience.
- Prior to enrollment in the 9th grade, districts shall provide students with details of the various Career Pathways and course offerings available to students. Class assignment for incoming ninth grade students could be based on the student's academic proficiency, career-oriented aptitudes and career interest, as determined by the district.

