



# COVID-19 Education Innovations: State Solution Spotlights



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ExcelinEd is gathering and promoting state education innovations and resources that are helping meet the educational needs of students affected by school closures as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Please share this brief with your state leaders who are seeking solutions and [send us your state's or school district's innovative efforts](#) for us to amplify and share nationally.

Looking for other resources? Visit ExcelinEd's website for more information and resources:

- [State Education Action Database and Map](#)
- [Resources for State and School Leaders](#)
- [Resources for Parents](#)

## FOOD SECURITY

### National/Multi-State

#### USDA Assistance for All States

USDA has approved waivers from all 50 states, DC, Guam, Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands, enabling Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) and National School Lunch Program Seamless Summer Option (SSO) sponsors to serve meals in a non-congregate setting and at school sites during coronavirus-related school closures. More information on food security: [www.fns.usda.gov/disaster/pandemic/covid-19](http://www.fns.usda.gov/disaster/pandemic/covid-19).

#### Hoonuit School Meal Finder

[Hoonuit](#) has worked with several states to develop a [map](#) that families can use to find school meal distribution centers. The site currently has data for Louisiana, Tennessee, Virginia and Texas, provided by state education agencies, plus some data from California and Alabama provided by local districts. **The company is offering [their service](#) free to other states and districts.** Check out the [Hoonuit School Meal Finder](#).

#### Pandemic Electronic Benefit Transfer Food Program

The Families First Coronavirus Response Act authorizes the USDA to approve the Pandemic Electronic Benefit Transfer (P-EBT) plans that states put forward. USDA can approve state requests to provide emergency SNAP benefits to households with children who would otherwise receive free or reduced-price meals if not for their schools being closed due to the COVID-19 emergency. In order to be eligible, the child's school must be closed for no less than 5 consecutive days. This would work similar to the Summer EBT plans operated in states, where summer food funding is sent to parents' electronic benefit cards instead of having to set up centralized stations. More information: [USDA Guidance](#) and [Child Hunger and the Coronavirus Pandemic: Getting Food to Students From Low-Income Backgrounds During School Closures](#).

### State Specific



## Florida Online Grocery Purchase Pilot Program for SNAP Recipients

The Florida Department of Children and Families (DCF) [announced a pilot program](#) for Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) recipients to purchase groceries online with the use of an EBT card. This partnership with federal, state and local partners will ensure Floridians can access nutritious food while also practicing social distancing and self-quarantining to reduce the spread of COVID-19. The pilot program in Florida will begin with an initial launch on April 16 and expand statewide on April 21, when both Walmart and Amazon online purchasing will be available. DCF will continue to coordinate with the USDA and the Florida Retail Federation to expand the network of retailers participating in the pilot program. More information: [Online Purchasing Pilot FAQs](#)

## MINIMIZING LEARNING LOSS

### Free Assessment Tool to Plan for the “COVID Slide” in Texas

The Texas Education Agency has [launched free, optional end-of-year assessments](#) that school systems and parents can choose to administer. This optional test does not take the place of the State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR), which Governor Greg Abbott cancelled this year due to COVID-19. The optional end-of-year assessment gives parents and educators access to a tool that shows what their students have learned and where they can improve their knowledge and understanding of key subject matter heading into the 2020-21 academic year.

### Haslams Aim to Hire 1,000 College Students to Tutor Tennessee Children This Summer

A new Tennessee Tutoring Corps aims to recruit at least 1,000 college students to provide summer tutoring for elementary-age students whose education has been disrupted by the coronavirus pandemic, reported [Chalkbeat Tennessee on May 12](#). Funded by the family foundation of former Gov. Bill Haslam and his wife, Crissy, the program will run from June to August in partnership with organizations representing nearly 90 Boys & Girls Clubs across the state. The goal will be to stem learning loss for up to 5,000 students from low-income families. Additionally, the program will leverage the talents of college students, about a third of whom have lost summer internships because of COVID-19. Tutors will be paid stipends of up to \$1,000.

## DIGITAL OR DISTANCE LEARNING & ACCESS

### National/Multi-State

### America’s Public Television Stations Providing Educational Content

America’s Public Television Stations are teaming up with states and local school districts to provide remote learning. School districts and state education agencies in more than 30 states have partnered with public media stations to provide education resources to parents and students. America’s Public Television Stations (APTS) also offers resources for parents and students, including an app and daily email. To see what is happening in the states and for more information on the resources, visit [APTS](#).



## Bridging the Digital Divide

Several internet providers are offering free internet and Wi-Fi access to homes with K-12 or college students in an effort to help with distance learning. They also announced waiving late fees and service cancellations to customers experiencing hardships because of the coronavirus pandemic and are unable to pay their bills. Also, many communities, including Palm Beach in Florida, are partnering with local companies to get more than 11,000 digital devices into the hands of students who need them to participate in online classes, as reported by [WPEC on March 20](#). For more information, see what [Charter Communications](#), [Comcast/Xfinity](#), and [AT&T](#) are doing.

## Free Online Courses Help Students Earn College Credit

Modern States Education Alliance's "Freshman Year for Free" program offers the first-ever catalog of tuition-free online courses for more than 30 core collegiate freshman subjects that lead to college credit. Taught by professors from leading universities, these free online courses prepare students for College Level Examination Program (CLEP) exams offered by the College Board. Modern States also offers Advanced Placement (AP) courses taught by professors from MIT, Rice, Purdue and other top universities. High school students can use all, or part of, each Modern States AP course to prepare for an AP exam in May. For more information, view the [course catalog](#) and read [Modern States' latest press release](#).

## State Specific

### California Issues Detailed Distance Learning Guidance

The California Department of Education provided detailed guidance for school districts to take into consideration when developing their distance learning plans, including a very detailed continuum of delivery strategies, while schools remain closed. Guidance included several high-quality examples of plans from across the state and country, including West Lake Charter School, Los Angeles Unified School District and Miami-Dade Public Schools. The department's guidance specifically addresses considerations for including economically disadvantaged students, students with disabilities and English learners. For more information see [California Department of Education Distance Learning Guidance](#) and [West Lake Charter School Distance Learning website](#).

### Florida Ramping Up Virtual School Training for Teachers and Student Capacity

The [Florida Department of Education](#) announced a partnership with the Florida Virtual School (FLVS) to offer student support and teacher professional development tailored to the online learning environment.

- The Florida Department of Education is also offering \$200 stipends to teachers who complete the training. As of April 1, 147 teachers have completed the training and an additional 3,417 are signed up.
- FLVS is increasing its server capacity to accommodate 2.7 million students by May 4.
- They have also partnered with the Alaska Department of Education and Early Development to launch the Alaska Statewide Virtual School to support Alaska's school districts and ensure ongoing opportunities for all students to learn.

#### Resources:

[FLVS Virtual Teacher Training for COVID-19](#)



### [Florida Department of Education Press Release](#)

#### [RedefinED: DOE Approves Expansion for Florida Virtual School](#)

Patricia Levesque joined Dr. Corey DeAngelis with Educational Freedom Institute for a [live conversation](#) about Florida Virtual School and remote learning

## Illinois Statewide Survey of Parents and Students

The Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) administered a Student Health and E-Learning Survey, which revealed that most districts in Illinois have barriers to providing e-learning. To follow-up on this, the ISBE conducted a technology needs survey to better understand what school districts need to move to a 1:1 environment at all grade levels and to provide online instruction to students. **This survey was open to all pre K-12 public and private schools in Illinois.** ISBE is working with the Governor's Office to explore opportunities within the philanthropic community to ensure that every public school in Illinois has the technology needed to provide e-learning to all students. For more information see [ISBE Coronavirus Updates and Resources](#).

## South Carolina Buses Turned into Mobile Hotspots

The [South Carolina Department of Education](#) has stationed 3,000 school buses with Wi-Fi access across the state for student use, starting March 23 when the first full week of remote learning began. Rural and high-poverty districts with limited Wi-Fi access are prioritized. For more information see [South Carolina Department of Education Memo](#) and [WLTX Report](#).

## Alaska Statewide Virtual School

To support Alaska's school districts and ensure ongoing opportunities for all students to learn, the Department of Education and Early Development (DEED) launched the Alaska Statewide Virtual School on March 31. Florida Virtual School (FLVS) Global and Alaska Telecom Association are supporting this effort to keep Alaska's students, families and educators connected through online educational programs. DEED chose to partner with FLVS Global because of the organization's long-standing success and reputation as an education leader with a history of innovation. For more information see [Alaska Statewide Virtual School](#) and [DEED Press Release](#).

## Vermont to Launch Statewide Online Learning Platform to Assist Districts

The Vermont Agency of Education will be providing a statewide continuity of learning platform and learning management system for any district needing that type of infrastructure support. This will be especially helpful for districts that do not have a student-facing learning management system ready to go. Continuity is crucial to maintain student learning and academic progress, as well as support their wellbeing. Districts are required to make the transition to continuity of learning on or before Monday, April 13. For more information, read the [Guidance on the Governor's Directive to Prepare for Transition to Continuity of Learning](#).



## Tennessee Awards \$20 Million in Broadband Accessibility Grants

Tennessee Governor Bill Lee and Department of Economic and Community Development Commissioner Bob Rolfe are providing \$19.7 million in [broadband accessibility grants](#) that will expand service to support 31,000 unserved Tennesseans in nearly 12,700 rural households and businesses, as reported by [The Tennessean on April 6](#). According to the FCC's 2019 Broadband Deployment Report, nearly one in four rural Tennesseans lack access to broadband. Governor Lee has also included \$25 million in FY2021's budget to continue the program.

## Kansas State University Launches Remote Learning P-12 Community

Kansas State University is expanding its resources to help people, across the world, transition to remote learning with a new free [digital community](#) for P-12 education, where educators and parents can share innovative ideas and resources that support student success. The online forum is open to parents, teachers, principals, superintendents and school counselors in Kansas and around the nation and world. This is a collaborative space to swap stories, experiences, ideas and resources around a shared mission to maintain educational services in times of unprecedented disruption.

## Virginia Learns Anywhere

The Virginia Department of Education convened a Continuity of Education Task Force, which includes families, educators, local and state leaders and business representatives. They crafted [comprehensive guidance](#) that will ensure learning continues for all students, while also ensuring students are served equitably, regardless of income level, access to technology, English Learner status or special needs. The guidance includes an emphasis on instructional models that could include blending of non-technology; face-to-face, small-group learning sessions; virtual platforms; and/or a combination of all of these models. School divisions are encouraged to utilize the Task Force guidance to develop and implement continuity for learning plans in partnership with families, staff members and local school boards.

## Instructional Continuity Grants Help Texas Districts Facilitate Remote Learning

Texas Education Commissioner Mike Morath recently announced new funding for districts and open-enrollment charter schools with at least one federally identified Targeted Support and Improvement Title I campus through the Texas Education Agency's [Instructional Continuity Grant](#). The grant provides funding for supplemental resources to increase districts' capacity to facilitate instructional continuity and distance, remote and/or virtual learning for campuses that have been closed due to COVID-19. District awards will range between \$10,500 and \$220,000 based on the number of identified schools.

## Illinois Education Leaders Build LearnAway! Website

Illinois education leaders, including the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, the Board of Higher Education, the State Board of Education and educators from around the state have partnered to build [LearnAway!](#) This new, online space supports the state's educators by providing resources, curriculum and ideas to inspire remote instruction and connection to learners. There are resources for all subject areas from reading and math, to chemistry, civics and foreign languages.



## Tennessee Gathers Public Input on CARES Act Educational Supports

Tennessee officials have released a [survey](#) to gather public input on how the state should spend the funds received from the federal Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security (CARES) Act to support the educational response work already underway and the future recovery efforts. Examples of eligible supports include better internet access and/or devices for students, addressing needs of special populations, professional development for effective distance learning strategies, online learning resources and mental health services. The deadline for completion is April 13.

## 32,000 Laptops Distributed to Small and Rural Florida Districts

On April 11, Governor Ron DeSantis and Education Commissioner Richard Corcoran announced that [32,614 laptop computers are being distributed](#) to 34 mostly small, rural school districts throughout Florida and the Florida A&M University Developmental Research School. When the COVID-19 crisis created the need for distance learning, the Department proactively began calling laptop suppliers throughout Florida and reaching out to rural county school districts to identify both available supply and demand.

These districts serve predominantly low-income students and these resources help ensure all Florida students will be able to continue learning while schools are closed.

## Distance Learning Mini-Grant Program

The Florida Education Foundation, Florida DOE's direct support organization, has launched a [mini-grant program](#) to offer public schools and districts, public charter schools and nonprofits the opportunity to receive matching funding for distance learning innovations that serve low-income students, enabling education to continue for those students through this crisis. Program criteria include devices and connectivity for students and teachers, enriching virtual curriculum, extra academic support programs and virtual professional development.

## Cross-Sector Partnership to Bridge the Digital Divide in California

To address inequities in student access to computers, technology tools and connectivity, companies, business leaders and philanthropists in California are providing internet access and Chromebooks to hundreds of thousands of households across the state. The coalition of business, philanthropists, the Public Utilities Commission and the State Transportation Agency is a new approach to meeting student needs.

The California State Transportation Agency is partnering with the City of Sacramento for a 60-day pilot program to outfit transit buses with super hotspots to provide high-speed Internet service to surrounding locations. Lessons learned from the pilot program will be converted into a model for cities throughout California to replicate.

**More information:** [Governor Newsom Press Release](#)



## Pennsylvania Awards Equity Grants to Overcome Gaps in Access to Instructional Materials

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Pennsylvania schools are developing and implementing continuity of education plans for their students. Not all students have access to the equipment or materials that enables them to learn remotely. The Pennsylvania Department of Education will award [\\$5 million in equity grants to help schools overcome gaps in student access to instructional materials. Grant funding may be used for any of the following:](#)

- Digital technology purchases, such as laptops, tablets or hot spots;
- Non-digital purchases, such as paper, postage or transportation of materials; and
- Accommodations that increase access to learning.

## GRADUATION REQUIREMENTS

### Kansas District-College Coordination

Brad Neuenswander, Kansas's deputy education commissioner, said it will be critical for state education officials to help districts and higher education institutions work together to coordinate requirements for dual-credit courses, scholarships and other programs that bridge K-12 to college, reported [Education Week on April 8](#). Kansas, the first state to decide to close its schools for the rest of the 2019-20 academic year, started coordinating meetings between community colleges and high schools as soon as schools first closed, to ensure students would get full credit and transition supports.

“It helps to focus on the student as an individual and help them to make that transition, even if it’s just reaching out to the next college and helping the student make those connections when colleges are closing their facilities and working from home, too,” Neuenswander said.

### Utah Expands Ways Students Can Demonstrate Learning Gains

Utah already had an option for students to “test out” of some classes using competency-based assessments, reported [Education Week on April 8](#). After its schools closed during the pandemic, Utah surveyed its districts on how they are approaching local flexibility on awarding credit for all students and seniors in particular. It found districts are rapidly casting a much wider net for ways students can prove they deserve academic credit, including projects, portfolios and other performance assessments in lieu of traditional tests this year.

At the time of the closures, fewer than half of reporting Utah districts already allowed district administrators to award credit based on a review of students’ work or projects, and a third of districts already allowed students to count recognized industry certifications or credentials toward graduation requirements. Now, another 20 percent or more of districts said they were considering accepting those credentials because of the COVID-19 disruptions.

## TEACHER TRAINING & SUPPORT

### GoTeachKY Launches Virtual Teacher Mentorship Program for COVID-19 Support



A new GoTeachKY initiative called [Teachers Helping Teachers](#) is connecting experienced educators to provide virtual coaching and support directly to other teachers to help them deal with the stresses of the COVID-19 crisis. GoTeachKY is an initiative of the Kentucky Department of Education to inspire and recruit the next generation of Kentucky educators. There currently are 18 mentors registered, who were recruited from the GoTeachKY ambassadors, the Kentucky National Board Network and educator preparation programs/colleges of education from across the state. The mentors will assist other educators while school buildings are closed due to the COVID-19 crisis. The mentors will aid in areas such as content planning, finding helpful resources, using technology and staying connected with their students.

## Florida Teacher Certification Exam Delayed and Fees Waived

To ease the financial and professional stress on Florida's teachers, the Department of Education [delayed teacher certification test requirements](#) and will provide teachers with the opportunity to take those tests at no cost. So far, the test costs for more than 22,000 teachers has been eliminated.

From April 1 through July 31, 2020, Florida Teacher Certification Examinations candidates can register for their exams free of charge. A voucher for a free exam is good for one year from the registration date.

## GENERAL HEALTH & SAFETY

### National/Multi-State

#### Childcare for Frontline Responders

States and schools are opening their doors to serve as childcare centers for critical workers and first responders. In [New York City](#), the education department has opened about 100 sites across the city for all children, regardless of whether they go to public or private school. The [Louisiana Department of Education](#) has opened its Child Care Assistance Program to help families access subsidized care for children ages 12 and younger at licensed child care centers or through registered in-home providers. In [Colorado](#), free emergency childcare has been expanded to include grocery, food processing and construction workers. [Iowa Department of Human Services](#) created a [live map](#) to help essential workers find childcare near them, and the state is partnering with schools, organizations and churches to expand childcare. Several other school districts and states, including [Arizona](#), [Indiana](#), [Illinois](#), [Rochester, MN](#) and [Vermont](#), are launching similar programs.

### State Specific

#### Florida Using University Students and Faculty to Aid Tracking of Coronavirus Spread

In an unprecedented gathering of resources, the State of Florida has recruited 100 professors and students from five universities to help the state understand COVID-19 and its spread, as reported by the [Tampa Bay Times on March 18](#). The professors and students are being hired as part-time epidemiologists to interview people with coronavirus about their history and symptoms, trace their contacts and enter that information into databases. They will be working in coordination with the Florida Department of Health's 264 infectious disease epidemiologists, conducting interviews by phone. For more information see [How did Florida hire 100 epidemiologists in a weekend? Here's how.](#)





## New Jersey Provides Financial Support to Clean Schools

As part of their emergency relief bills, the New Jersey Assembly approved \$20 million for the Department of Education to support increased facility cleaning and sanitization of **all public, charter and private schools**. For more information See [29 measures & \\$65M for NJ schools, business, kids during coronavirus](#) and [Legislation language](#).