



Dr. Priscilla Canales, Superintendent of Schools

March 2020

School Closure

Remote Working Handbook



Human Resources Department

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Remote working is being permitted at this time due to the COVID-19 public health pandemic. This will allow for continuity of instruction and the basic operations of our district. This handbook outlines key considerations and guidance specific to COVID-19 remote work, including information that may be different from the employee handbook. Any information found within this handbook may supersede current operations. If you are not clear on expectations, please email all questions to your immediate supervisor or principal.

Administrative Policy Statement

Weslaco ISD is committed to providing flexible work arrangements during the declared disaster of COVID-19. At the discretion of the Superintendent, positions in the district will be designated as: essential onsite, essential partial onsite, or home-based and are subject to change based on the needs of the district's responsibility to ensure instructional continuity, meal services, and basic operations. All employees will still be governed by board policy and the WISD employee handbook, regardless of their assigned working location.

Workers at Higher Risk

Employees who are at increased risk for complications from COVID-19 due to underlying health conditions, are urged to consult their physician about steps they can take to protect their health. These may include requesting a temporary change in job location, hours, assignment or duties, or implementation of additional protective measures to reduce their risk of infection.

If the employee's work may be accomplished remotely, they should request to work from home from their principal/supervisor. If the employee's work may not be accomplished remotely, they may use personal leave if they wish to stay out of the workplace entirely. A doctor's note may be required.

Essential Employees

By direction of the Governor and the Commissioner for education, WISD is only closed for the purpose of onsite education of students. The District is expected to serve as a continuously operating school district and many employees must work on a campus or facility to provide services that are essential to maintaining the functionality of the district. The Superintendent will designate which positions in the district are essential to ensuring that students are fed daily, students continue to receive instruction, employees continue to get paid, and facilities continue to be maintained and the maintenance of facilities.

Remote Work

While working remotely, it is the responsibility of employees to follow the acceptable use policies for technology as approved by the District. Employees will refrain from sharing files, emailing or posting information that is considered confidential student or staff information. If a situation arises and a file must be shared, the employee is responsible for contacting the technology department to request access to encryption services.

Per a new State law, all employee personal devices remain subject to public information requests. This includes cell phones, computers, tablets, emails, texts, etc. It is the responsibility of the employee to secure proper backup of non-district devices and communications.

Remote work cannot be a substitute for ongoing child care needs. In light of COVID-19, employees may care for children during school or child care closures. Remote work may occur while dependents are present, if their school or child care is closed and alternative care is unavailable, under the following guidelines:

- WISD is not responsible or liable for the health and safety of employee dependents while working remotely, or for employee health and safety while delivering care to dependents. It is up to the employee to determine whether work can be conducted safely.
- If a dependent is ill and requires ongoing attention, employees may need to use leave time, as needed. Employees are expected to determine what they can reasonably accomplish while dependents are under their care (whether healthy or ill), and the amount of time they expect to be able to work.

All employees are responsible for ensuring they are meeting the scheduled times for work as assigned.

Remote Work Expectations

Due to the fast pace of this evolving situation and the anticipated wide use of remote work, employees may receive information updates. All changes will be communicated through email. If you have an individual request, submit your request in writing to your principal/supervisor.

***Security and Disclosure of Information**

WISD owned data, software, equipment, facilities and supplies must be properly protected and secured, and must not be used to create employee-owned software or personal data. Employees accessing confidential information should do so by using a virtual private network (VPN). Employees agree to follow all computing and data security policies and guidelines established by WISD. In the event that WISD, at its sole discretion, provides equipment, software, and/or supplies for use by employees during the telecommute period, employees agree that any use of equipment, software, and supplies provided by WISD for use at the offsite work location is limited to authorized people and for the purposes related to work, and that it remains the property of WISD.

WISD employees will comply with all WISD policies and instructions regarding the security of student, personal or confidential information. Any software, products or data created while telecommuting is owned by WISD and must be produced in the approved format and medium. Employees agree to protect WISD records from unauthorized disclosure or damage and will comply with all requirements of the law regarding disclosure of WISD information.

Communication Expectations

- Campus-based professionals will communicate with students and parents through email, and approved messaging applications or by phone call.

- All emails will be checked at least four times during working hours. If an email is received within working hours, a **response** within **2** hours is expected. If the email is received outside of working hours, the employee will respond before the end of the next work day.
- If an employee is not comfortable using a virtual environment for phone calls or using their personal cell phone they may coordinate with the principal/supervisor to utilize space within the District.
- If an employee does not have internet access at home or is unable to connect from home, it is the responsibility of the employee to coordinate time on campus/office with their principal/ supervisor. The District will not provide internet access for employees.
- All WISD policies and procedures regarding communication with students are still applicable. Please refer to the WISD social media expectations reviewed at the beginning of the year. If you need a copy of this document, please request one from your principal. Unless otherwise assigned, non-exempt employees are not permitted to contact students.

Meetings

Your principal/supervisor will define what tools you will use to hold meetings virtually. All scheduled meetings are mandatory. Failure to log into the scheduled meeting will result in a deduction of leave, or pay if leave is not available.

Weekly Meetings

- The campus principal will schedule at minimum 1 virtual weekly campus-wide meeting.
- Department Heads/Grade Level Leads will schedule at least 1 virtual department meeting per week.
- Instructional Facilitators will schedule at least one virtual meeting per week per teacher.
- Each non-campus department will hold at least one weekly department meeting.

Contact Information

The employee shall provide multiple forms of contact information to his/her supervisor.

Home Environment

Consider whether your home environment is conducive to remote work. Although the District does not expect staff to be “alone” during working hours, it is expected that the working environment is conducive to being productive during such times. For example, during working hours, employees will be asked to join live meetings, create video lessons for students, etc. It is the responsibility of the employee to ensure that the environment in which they are working allows for proper lighting, noise levels and is not disruptive to the work environment. Set expectations with others in your home regarding your interactions and availability. Student confidentiality must be upheld while working in the home environment.

At no time should non-employees or persons without an education interest be permitted to participate or view an online classroom without the consent of the principal.

The safety and security of the online classroom is the responsibility of the classroom teacher or district employee charged with supervising or leading the online classroom. All links to online

classrooms/resources must be provided to the campus principal at least 24 hours prior to the launch/use of an online classroom.

Prior to recording/beginning an online classroom, all staff will ensure that the persons entering the “room”, viewing the content or participating are students enrolled in the course. If the instructor/staff member believes that there is an issue, they must report it to the campus principal immediately.

Time & Performance

Communicate regularly with your principal or supervisor regarding your work priorities, deliverables, timelines, etc. Ensure you are communicating the completion of work assignments, documenting all work completed, and submitting required work by deadlines.

Telecommuting Schedule

Unless otherwise agreed to or required by the supervisor, an employee’s work schedule shall be the same as the employee’s schedule in the customary worksite, including meal breaks and rest periods.

Employees shall conform to established district policies and procedures as they relate to work hours, including overtime, and leave usage. In the event that a non-exempt (para-professional, hourly) employee may need to work overtime, the employee must obtain advance supervisory/superintendent’s approval in writing or via email before performing the overtime work. As a reminder, no employees have been authorized to work more than 40 hours either at the district facilities or remotely from home. Working overtime without such approval may result in termination of the telecommuting privilege and/or other appropriate action.

All non-exempt (para-professional, hourly) employees who are asked to physically come in to work will utilize a FEMA PREMIUM PAY TIMECARD reporting method during onsite working hours

While telecommuting, employees must be available via telephone, email, or virtually/by videoconference. At the discretion of the supervisor, an employee may be asked to work from their customary WISD worksite if needed. Employees agree not to conduct any in-person work meetings at the off-site work location.

Work Performance

The quantity and quality of work performed while telecommuting should be comparable to the work completed in the district office/campus setting. In situations where a comparison cannot be made, the employee must adhere to deadlines and meet established objectives. Supervisors may require employees to provide reports, artifacts or work products that demonstrate work performed or accomplished on telecommuting work days.

Technology

At a minimum, employees need a computer, internet, and phone access. If you do not have a district-issued laptop/device, but have a personally owned computer/laptop/ipad, you may use this. However, you are responsible for following all district practices and policies to maintain security on your device. Speak to your internet/cell provider about your plan(s) to ensure that you will not experience any overage fees. Weslaco ISD does not cover the cost of home internet and phone and does not insure personal technology.

Timekeeping During Flexible Arrangements

Exempt (administrative, professional, teachers, etc.) employees are not covered by the overtime and record-keeping requirements of the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA). Even though the law allows this latitude, exempt staff members still need to discuss specific scheduling arrangements with their supervisors and obtain their supervisor's approval.

Non-exempt (para-professional/hourly) employees must conform to the overtime, time record-keeping, and meal break provisions of the Fair Labor Standards Act. Supervisors should communicate remote work requirements and expectations, and use an electronic timekeeping mechanism (email, Remote Work at Home timesheets/cards via google docs, other online sharing methods, etc.) for recording all hours worked.

Therefore, supervisors must ensure accurate recording of all hours worked both onsite and remote work completed at home. Requests to deviate from the assigned schedule must be preapproved by the principal/supervisor/superintendent.

FEMA PREMIUM PAY TIMECARD – Physical work completed onsite with approval

REMOTE HOME TIMECARD – Work assignments completed remotely at home

(Timecards may be located in the HR Administrative Library)

Employee Attendance

Employees are required to work during all designated times both in the District and virtually. Any deviation from the provided schedule or responsibilities may result in a deduction of leave or pay if leave is not available.

All employees are considered “on call” when working remotely, Monday – Friday from 8:00 AM – 5:00 PM with a one-hour lunch. Employees will answer calls and respond to emails. Upon request, any employee called will report to work within one hour. Any deviation from these requirements must be approved by the principal/supervisor prior to making any changes.

EMPLOYEE RIGHTS: PAID SICK LEAVE AND EXPANDED FAMILY AND MEDICAL LEAVE UNDER THE FAMILIES FIRST CORONAVIRUS RESPONSE ACT

The Families First Coronavirus Response Act (FFCRA or Act) requires certain employers to provide their employees with paid sick leave and expanded family and medical leave for specified reasons related to COVID-19. These provisions will apply from April 1, 2020 through December 31, 2020.

► PAID LEAVE ENTITLEMENTS

Generally, employers covered under the Act must provide employees: Up to two weeks (80 hours, or a part-time employee’s two-week equivalent) of paid sick leave based on the higher of their regular rate of pay, or the applicable state or Federal minimum wage, paid at:

- 100% for qualifying reasons #1-3 below, up to \$511 daily and \$5,110 total;
- 2/3 for qualifying reasons #4 and 6 below, up to \$200 daily and \$2,000 total; and
- Up to 12 weeks of paid sick leave and expanded family and medical leave paid at 2/3 for qualifying reason #5 below for up to \$200 daily and \$12,000 total.

A part-time employee is eligible for leave for the number of hours that the employee is normally scheduled to work over that period.

► ELIGIBLE EMPLOYEES

In general, employees of private sector employers with fewer than 500 employees, and certain public sector employers, are eligible for up to two weeks of fully or partially paid sick leave for COVID-19 related reasons (see below). Employees who have been employed for at least 30 days prior to their leave request may be eligible for up to an additional 10 weeks of partially paid expanded family and medical leave for reason #5 below.

► QUALIFYING REASONS FOR LEAVE RELATED TO COVID-19

An employee is entitled to take leave related to COVID-19 if the employee is unable to work, including unable to telework, because the employee:

1. is subject to a Federal, State, or local quarantine or isolation order related to COVID-19;	5. is caring for his or her child whose school or place of care is closed (or child care provider is unavailable) due to COVID-19 related reasons; or
2. has been advised by a health care provider to self-quarantine related to COVID-19;	6. is experiencing any other substantially-similar condition specified by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.
3. is experiencing COVID-19 symptoms and is seeking a medical diagnosis;	
4. is caring for an individual subject to an order described in (1) or self-quarantine as described in (2);	

ENFORCEMENT

The U.S. Department of Labor’s Wage and Hour Division (WHD) has the authority to investigate and enforce compliance with the FFCRA. Employers may not discharge, discipline, or otherwise discriminate against any employee who lawfully takes paid sick leave or expanded family and

medical leave under the FFCRA, files a complaint, or institutes a proceeding under or related to this Act. Employers in violation of the provisions of the FFCRA will be subject to penalties and enforcement by WHD. (<https://www.dol.gov/agencies/whd>) Both posters (English and Spanish) can be located on both our WISD Human Resources webpage and the district’s main web page under the (COVID-19) tab for easy access.

***COMPENSATION (PAY)**

The Weslaco ISD Board of Trustees passed a resolution that supports continued compensation. WISD will provide compensation to “regular” (Exempt and Non-Exempt) employees for the district-wide closure on March 20, 2020 and continue to keep our regular employees actively employed and compensated.

Exempt: Administrative, Professional, Teachers, etc.

Non-Exempt: Para-professional, Hourly staff, etc.

Premium Pay to Non-exempt Employees

Effective Monday, March 23, 2020, all non-exempt employees who are required to physically work at a campus or district facility during an emergency closure will be paid at a premium pay rate (e.g. time-and-one half). Premium pay is attached only to the hours physically worked by non-exempt employees at a district facility as approved by the principal/supervisor/superintendent.

Example: If a custodian normally works 40 hours per week at \$10.00 per hour, he would receive 40 hours of regular pay (\$400) during closure. If authorized by policy and/or resolution and approved by the principal/supervisor/superintendent and the employee physically works 10 hours at a district facility, the employee’s pay would be calculated as follows:

$$\begin{array}{r} 30 \text{ hours} \times \$10.00 = \$300 \\ \underline{10 \text{ hours} \times \$15.00 = \$150} \\ 40 \text{ hours} \quad = \$450 \end{array}$$

***All non-exempt employees who are asked to physically come in to work will utilize a FEMA PREMIUM PAY TIMECARD reporting method to record all physical onsite working hours.**

Unemployment Compensation

Other employee categories such as: Substitutes, Mentors, Tutors, other part-time, etc., who do not continue to receive pay during school closure may be eligible to file for unemployment compensation benefits based on an employee’s earnings over the past 18 months during this unscheduled break (April – May 2020) when no work is available. The Texas Workforce Commission recently waived the required ‘waiting period’ and job search requirements in light of the current disaster.

Letters of reasonable assurance will be issued to all currently active substitutes for their continued employment on the same substitute basis for the upcoming 2020-2021 school year.

BENEFITS

Employees who are currently enrolled in an WISD Benefits Plan will continue to receive health benefits so long as employee premiums are paid. WISD is committed to our employees' health and will continue its monthly contribution to employees benefits.

STAFFING (NEW HIRES)

WISD intends to continue posting and filling vacancies as well as planning for staffing needs in the coming school year. As such, WISD-HR Dept. is developing a plan for virtual recruiting, candidate sourcing, and hiring to the extent possible.

Travel

All staff are bound by current regulations for requesting time off. The expectation is that all employees approved for remote working will not travel during working days/hours. All requests for leave from Monday – Friday, 8:00am – 4:00pm with a 30-minute lunch will be approved by the employee's supervisor. If an employee chooses to travel during the declaration of disaster, they will be required to obtain a medical release to return to work. It is the responsibility of the employee to disclose any travel outside of the Region One area.

Volunteer Service

Weslaco ISD will not permit any volunteers to be in the district or work with students virtually.

Work Assignments

All employees are subject to assignment changes at the discretion of the Superintendent. All work assignments will be based on the needs of the students and the overall functionality of the District. In addition, the Superintendent may approve additional duties within working hours to ensure the District functionality does not cease. Furthermore, in anticipation of a long-term closure, staff may receive assignments to prepare for summer and the 2020-2021 school year.

In addition to work assignments, teachers and staff may be assigned professional development, book studies or other job-related assignments.

Standards of Conduct

Employee expectations within the WISD Employee Handbook, Board Policy DH (Local), and the Code of Ethics and Standard Practices for Texas Educators continue to apply when providing remote learning and in virtual meetings.

In addition, staff are expected to maintain student confidentiality in accordance with FERPA during remote learning.

WISD reserves the right to modify the details of this handbook at any time.