



STATE OF CONNECTICUT
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION



TO: Superintendents of Schools

FROM: Ajit Gopalakrishnan *Ajit Gopalakrishnan*
Chief Performance Officer

DATE: June 5, 2020

SUBJECT: Recommendations for a Supportive and Inclusive Registration System
During the COVID-19 Pandemic

The COVID-19 crisis has forced school administrators to rethink many aspects of education, including student registration. Traditionally, parents with students who were new to a district had to register in-person so they could provide the required enrollment documentation per the Connecticut State Department of Education's (CSDE's) [enrollment guidance](#). In the last few years, many districts implemented online registration systems while continuing to offer in-person registration for families who do not have access to technology, need translation, or request other help.

However, with district offices closed to the public due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the in-person option is not presently available. Consequently, it is important that districts create alternatives to in-person registration to offer supportive and inclusive registration systems for all families — and communicate these alternatives to parents. Below are recommendations for providing families with supportive and inclusive registration systems during the COVID-19 pandemic that may help districts ensure all children are enrolled in school.

- **Mobile friendly online registration system.** Many families who do not have computers at home rely on phones for internet access. Districts can make sure their online registration systems function well when accessed by phone.
- **A central phone number and in-person support.** Districts can promote a central phone number where staff are available to walk parents through the registration process and, if needed, complete the form for them. For parents who need translation services, appointments can be scheduled for times when a translator is available. The central phone number should be publicized widely and appear on every school web page.
- **Every school phone is answered and voice mails are returned promptly.** The first step for many parents is to call the school where they intend to enroll their child. Districts can ensure that school phone numbers are answered during the day and that voice mails are returned promptly.
- **Multiple options for parents to submit required documentation remotely.** Online systems usually allow parents to upload photos or scanned copies of documents. As alternatives to an online system, districts can allow parents to present documents during a video phone call with staff using an app such as FaceTime or WhatsApp. The documents can also be mailed or dropped off at the district office to be verified and then picked up or mailed back.
- **Registration outreach social-distancing style.** Districts are finding innovative ways to accommodate families who do not have access to computers or phones. Some districts take a school bus equipped with a hot spot, computers and staff to areas of the city where they know families struggle with access to technology. Using social distancing procedures, staff meet with parents to input registration information and photograph necessary documents.

- **Accommodate housing circumstances that warrant the protection of the federal McKinney-Vento Act.** These may include temporary living arrangements deemed necessary to maintain health and safety during the COVID-19 pandemic. Under the direction of the local McKinney-Vento liaison, districts are encouraged to:
 - train all staff in the registration process and the McKinney-Vento Act requirements;
 - include a housing questionnaire that helps screen for McKinney-Vento eligibility;
 - offer alternatives for residency documentation that considers temporary, shared housing arrangements;
 - ensure parents and youth are provided with a summary of McKinney-Vento eligibility criteria and rights.
- **Timely and accessible communication.** At the heart of any approach to an inclusive registration system is timely and accessible communication. Community partners, such as social service agencies, houses of worship, medical providers, and food banks can be key allies in bridging language and cultural barriers to facilitate communication between families and schools.

For more information on connecting with families, please see [Full, Equal and Equitable Partnerships with Families: Connecticut's Definition and Framework for Family Engagement](#).

Please do not hesitate to contact the following CSDE staff for any questions about these recommendations:

- Family and Community Engagement: Dr. Judy Carson, judy.carson@ct.gov
- Homeless Education/McKinney Vento: Louis Tallarita, Louis.Tallarita@ct.gov
- PSIS Data Collection: Kendra Shakir, Kendra.Shakir@ct.gov.

Thank you.