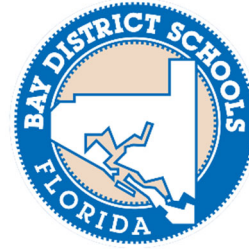


TO: Parents/Guardians
FROM: Bill Husfelt, Superintendent
RE: DOE Emergency Order
DATE: April 12, 2021



Late last week, DOE Commissioner Richard Corcoran released Emergency Order 2021-EO-02 giving school districts much-needed flexibility when it comes to testing used this year for promotion and graduation.

I am incredibly grateful for the leadership of Commissioner Corcoran and Governor DeSantis during this pandemic and for their emphasis on ensuring that the needs of our students remain at the forefront of our conversations, executive actions, legislation and planning for the future. I thought recovering from Hurricane Michael was the most difficult challenge I would be faced with as your Superintendent but the pandemic proved me wrong. Making sure we do everything possible to focus on the safety of our students, our staff and our families, while also trying to keep students focused academically, has been a monumental challenge for us all. I must say, however, that I am so proud of the way our entire community responded to this challenge and I'll be eternally grateful for the immense sacrifices of our employees who have been determined to keep school going despite numerous obstacles.

Every day I get dozens of calls and emails from companies offering to "help" us reopen school and they are always quite surprised to hear that we've been in school since August and that, as you can see from our website, our Covid numbers have been extremely low thanks to the diligence of our students and staff and the support of our families.

We may not all agree on masks or vaccines but I've been so grateful for the community's support and the appreciation our employees have felt, and continue to feel, as we finish out this very strange school year. We were #850Strong after Hurricane Michael decimated our community and we've managed to dig even deeper to come together in new and creative ways (while social distancing of course) as a result of Covid-19. I am so proud to call Bay County my home.

While the entire order from Commission Corcoran is quite lengthy, and can be read in its entirety on the DOE website at <http://www.fldoe.org/em-response/>, I thought it might be helpful if I summarized some of the most important points:

GRADUATION REQUIREMENTS/BRIGHT FUTURES/GOLD SEAL/CAPE SCHOLARS

I know that we have all been worried about the impact of the pandemic on our graduating seniors. While I am heartbroken for the memories many of them lost last year and this year, I am grateful the state has taken that into consideration when giving us the flexibility we need to do what's right for them.

The Emergency Order (EO) contains the following provisions for our graduates:

1. Members of the Class of 2021 are expected to pass the regular state-mandated assessments (Grade 10 ELA and Alg 1 EOC) in order to graduate HOWEVER the order grants districts the authority to waive one or more of those if the district has evidence that the “student’s high school record establishes a comparable level of achievement.” This only applies to students expected to graduate this school year.
2. School counselors, or other persons approved by the district, can submit transcript documentation to the DOE in lieu of the required volunteer service hours if the student was unable to complete those hours due to the pandemic. This applies to students seeking Bright Futures, Gold Seal and CAPE scholarships.
3. Required testing deadlines for the SAT/ACT for Bright Futures have been extended to 12/2/21. The same deadline now applies to students taking the PERT for the Gold Seal Vocational Scholars Award.

END-OF-COURSE EXAMS

We know that many of our students are worried about these exams and the EO addresses that and notes: “School districts and charter school governing boards are authorized to determine promotion and final course grades in classes with state end-of-course (EOC) exams, based solely on the student’s performance in the course, including in instances where the student does not have a score from the EOC exam.” If this exemption is applicable to your student, someone from his/her school will be in contact. All students will be expected to participate in required EOC testing ... any applicable waivers will be granted after the fact not before.

PROMOTION/RETENTION

Testing plays a HUGE role in determining graduation and promotion and so I am very pleased to see this addressed in the EO in the following verbiage:

1. Decisions about whether it is in the best interest of a child to repeat a grade solely for academic reasons must be determined at the local level by the school’s principal, after a careful review of the student’s academic record, with input from the parents, the student, teachers and school leaders.
2. Third grade promotion - A student may be promoted to grade four, regardless of the absence of an English Language Arts (ELA) assessment score or the absence of a Level 2 or higher ELA score, if the district is able to determine that a student is performing at least at Level 2 on the ELA assessment through the good cause exemption process.
3. For students at risk of being retained, the school district and charter schools must provide extra supports in concert with those interventions required. BDS has been providing after-school tutoring for many students and extensive efforts will be made this summer to ensure all struggling students are attending FREE enhanced summer school programs.

If any of this verbiage is applicable to your student’s situation, someone from his/her school will be in contact with you before the end of the school year.

VOLUNTARY PRE-KINDERGARTEN

The EO references the fact that some programs were unable to meet the minimum hours due to the pandemic and notes, “due to the fact that many districts and programs are operating their Spring 2021 education programs into the middle and latter days of June and, therefore, meeting current law would be a physical impossibility, the provisions of s. 1002.61(2)(a), Fla. Stat., requiring a minimum of 300 hours of instruction is suspended for the 2021 Summer VPK program for public schools and private prekindergarten providers.” BDS is offering a condensed version of Summer VPK for 200 hours this summer.

SCHOOL GRADES

The order contains several provisions that address school grades and the calculation of teacher evaluations using student achievement data. While some of that is very complex, the following excerpts are probably the most pertinent to all parents/guardians:

1. Instead of assigning school grades and school improvement ratings, for the 2020-21 academic year, the DOE will update its “Know Your Schools” federally compliant public reporting tool excluding summative district and school grades and school improvement ratings. The flexibility provided to school districts and charter schools is limited to the 2020-21 school year.
2. Except as provided in section IV.C. of this Order, all schools in Florida will retain their pre-COVID designations.
3. Any school that tests 90 percent or more of its eligible students, within 30 days after the release of all state testing data, any school district or charter school governing board may apply to the Department to opt in to have one or more 2020-21 school grades or school improvement ratings apply for all statutory purposes that are associated with a school grade or rating.

This is particularly important language for several of our schools that have been working very hard to improve their school grades but have not seen letter grade increases since the hurricane due to previously-granted waivers.

Thank you again for allowing us to be your trusted educational partners. We are grateful for your trust, your partnership and your support and we appreciate the opportunity to serve our students and our community.