



CONTINUING SCHOOL IN TIMES OF CRISIS

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It's nearly impossible to look at your phone or turn on the TV without seeing the headlines: wildfires, hurricanes, global epidemics. Odds are, you probably read or watched a story about one of these topics within the past hour. The events and the stories surrounding them are often tragic--loss of life, illness, natural resources destroyed, devastating property loss. One of the overlooked aspects of these stories, however, is what happens to children in the event that schools are closed or, worse, damaged or destroyed.

During natural disasters and similar types of events (and even the occasional lengthy teachers' strike), it's not uncommon for schools to be closed for weeks, if not months. In 2003, when the SARS epidemic was running rampant in Hong Kong, schools there were closed for six weeks in an effort to control the spread of the virus. In Butte County, California, the Paradise Unified School District lost 154 days of the 2018-19 school year due to wildfires. In the same county, the Chico Unified School District lost 284 days--or the equivalent of about 1-1/2 school years. In New Orle-

ans, 110 out of 126 public schools were completely destroyed by Hurricane Katrina in 2005; children were out of school for over a year in some cases.

Right now, schools are closing hastily in some parts of the country due to concerns sparked by the outbreak of the novel coronavirus. Schools in Hong Kong, China, and Italy, where COVID-19 cases are the highest, have been closed for weeks, if not longer. The question is: what can be done about school when it's forced to be closed for an extended period of time?

FEDERAL AID

In December 2019, the U.S. Department of Education (DOE) announced \$155 million in federal aid to assist schools and students impacted by natural disasters in 13 states as well as the Northern Mariana Islands. This funding supports three grant programs:

- Immediate Aid to Restart School Operations. These are awarded to state education agencies to provide assistance or services related to the restart of operations in, the reopening of, and the re-enrollment of students in public and non-public elementary and secondary schools that serve an area affected by a covered disaster or emergency.
- Temporary Emergency Dispatch Aid for Displaced Students. These grants are awarded to state education agencies to disperse to help districts pay the extra costs of providing education to students displaced by natural disasters.
- Emergency Assistance to Institutions of Higher Education. This type of grant is provided to institutions of higher education to mitigate the effects of a covered disaster or emergency, including renovation or reconstruction of damaged facilities. Priority is given to projects that support students who are, or are at risk of becoming, homeless in the aftermath of a natural disaster.

TEMPORARY ENROLLMENT IN OTHER SCHOOL DISTRICTS

When schools have been closed, damaged, or destroyed, and the school is unable to open for an extended period of time, many school districts work with neighboring districts to allow their students to attend school there; in some cases, schools may operate different campuses, which could temporarily take in students from an affected school. Recent tornadoes in South Carolina, Dallas, Texas, and Nashville, Tennessee have forced students to relocate to other schools, allowing them to continue their education while the damaged schools are renovated or rebuilt.

Children whose families have lost their homes are generally covered under the [McKinney-Vento Act](#). This act "is a federal law that ensures the right of students to go to school even when they are homeless or don't have a permanent address. The Act aims to reduce barriers that have prevented many homeless youth from enrolling, attending, and succeeding in school, including transportation; residency requirements; and documentation requirements, such as birth certificates and medical records." This does cover displacement due to natural disasters and allows children temporarily living in hotels or motels, emergency shelters, and with relatives in other towns to immediately enroll in and attend school within the school district where they're temporarily living.

TEMPORARY HOMESCHOOLING OR INDEPENDENT STUDY.

This is an appealing and quite viable option if the student's displacement will be extended due to an illness or school closure. Many of the millions of students forced out of school due to coronavirus closures in [China, Hong Kong, and Italy](#) have taken up [homeschooling](#)—"attending" live-streamed and recorded online classes, completing online assignments, and gathering as a group on sites such as Google Hangouts. School districts in Bellevue, Washington and Miami-Dade County, Florida made laptops and other electronic devices available to their students so their education is minimally impacted while schools are closed.

Homeschooling for just a few weeks isn't a practical solution, but it's a wonderful choice for the longer term or until the original school situation becomes more settled or permanent. [Bridgeway Academy](#), for example, [offers plenty of options](#) to help bridge the gap in schooling, so students don't fall behind. Whether it's individual live classes, self-paced online courses, or textbook learning, an accredited homeschool academy like [Bridgeway](#) can be of great assistance and help keep your student on track even during difficult times.

When schools close, there are options for your child's education. While it may not be top of mind right away, getting your kids back to school (in any form) and into a routine is so important in times of crisis. Not only does it re-establish a sense of normalcy in their lives, but it prevents further issues down the road if your child has fallen behind in his or her studies. And while it may be impossible to prevent or avoid natural disasters or epidemics, it is possible to continue your child's education should you find yourself in one of these types of situations.