



September 28, 2021

Dear Director Thomas,

Thank you for your waiver submission on September 28, 2021.

The commissioner of education may consider waivers related to of the provisions of Tenn. Comp. R. & Regs. Chapters 0520-01-03 and 0520-01-13 related to remote instruction to the extent necessary to allow students affected at the classroom or school level by COVID-19 isolation or quarantine to participate in remote instruction. As stated, your district still has the authority to quarantine students and staff on an individual case-by-case basis (not in the aggregate). Waivers will only be considered when a LEA can document and demonstrate a significant impact of COVID-19 quarantine or isolation on school operations, impacting students, teachers, and/or staff. Please note, if a waiver request is granted to a school, all extracurricular activities for that school must also be cancelled for the duration of the waiver period.

The waiver submitted by Knox County Schools for 1 school is **approved**.

The rationale for this approval is:

- Over 1/3 of staff are absent and there are legitimate concerns with rising cases and the ability to identify alternative personnel for mandatory staffing on buses, in classrooms, etc.
- The district utilized central office staff to support and continues to require

If not already in place, the department also continues to encourage all districts to implement as many mitigation strategies as possible to contain the spread of COVID-19, limit quarantines, and remain in-person, such as utilizing:

- The same or enhanced mitigation strategies used last school year such as temperature checks, physical distancing, frequent handwashing, etc.
- Seating charts in all settings, including classrooms, cafeteria/meals, bus routes, etc.
- Proactively stocking non-perishable items for breakfasts/lunches to account for meal staff absences
- Cohorting students to limit close contacts
- The consideration of masking

I continue to be incredibly grateful for the work of your district, educators, students and families as we collectively address and respond to COVID-19.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "P. Schwinn".

Penny Schwinn, PhD, MAT
Commissioner, Tennessee Department of Education

Local Education Agency Waiver Request Application: COVID-19 Relief

Upon application by the local education agency (LEA) for one (1) or more of its classrooms or schools, pursuant to Tenn. Code Ann. § 49-1-209 (d), the commissioner of education will consider waivers of the provisions of Tenn. Comp. R. & Regs. Chapters 0520-01-03 and 0520-01-13 related to remote instruction to the extent necessary to allow students affected at the classroom or school level by COVID-19 isolation or quarantine to participate in remote instruction. This waiver process is not required for individual students on quarantine.

Waivers will only be considered when a LEA can document and demonstrate a significant impact of COVID-19 quarantine or isolation on school operations, impacting students, teachers, and/or staff. Please note, if a waiver request is granted to a school, all extracurricular activities for that school must also be cancelled.

Please submit completed applications to Commissioner.Schwinn@tn.gov. Following review by the commissioner or designee, the local education agency will be notified in writing if the waiver request application is approved or denied. If approved, the waiver will only be valid for seven (7) calendar days. If conditions warranting a waiver persist, then the LEA may submit additional waivers.

Knox County Schools

Local Education Agency

912 S. Gay Street

Knoxville

37923

Street

City

Zip

Bob Thomas

Sept. 28, 2021

Director of Schools (Signature)

Date

1. Number of **classrooms** for which you are requesting a waiver: _____

Grade of Classroom	Name of School	In Quarantine or Isolation					
		# of Teachers	% of Teachers	# of Staff	% of Staff	# of Students	% of Students

Please explain why this waiver is necessary and in-person instruction is not feasible at this time:

2. Number of **schools** for which you are requesting a waiver: 1

Name of School	# of Teachers	% of Teachers	In Quarantine or Isolation		# of Students	% of Students
			# of Staff	% of Staff		
Ridgedale School			11	14%	2	3%

Please explain why this waiver is necessary and in-person instruction is not feasible at this time:

Knox County Schools is requesting a waiver for Ridgedale School.

The number of active cases among staff has quickly increased to 7 confirmed cases with another 4 currently waiting test results. Additionally, 2 substitutes who only work at Ridgedale and a Behavioral Liaison are out due to Covid.

The majority of impacted staff are not expected to return to work until Oct. 6, with some not returning until Oct. 8.

Two students are absent due to Covid.

Ridgedale is a small, special day program for students with disabilities. Not only does the high rate of positive COVID cases at Ridgedale impact students' health, but because they require multiple staff and specialized programming, COVID is impacting the school's ability to maintain safety.

Additionally, the school's absentee rate is impacting transportation, as the majority of students utilize district transportation and require staff on buses to maintain safety. Some buses are required to have 2 staff present at all times.

In total, 24 staff are absent, which is a 36% absentee rate. Central Office staff has been deployed - away from their daily responsibilities - to help sub at this school.

The school is prepared for virtual instruction. For CDC students, staff will provide a daily schedule appropriate for their needs and focuses on IEP goals and objectives, as well as both at-home resources and asynchronous activities.