



April 2, 2020

Dear Classified Employees:

In response to the county and state “stay at home” orders that are now in effect, Guilford County Schools (GCS) has reduced the number of hourly employees we are asking to continue working on-site. Our goal is to protect the health and well-being of our employees, while also doing our part – as one of the county’s largest employers – to reduce community spread of the coronavirus.

Our on-site workers are now considered *mandatory employees* in keeping with a new policy adopted last Friday by the North Carolina State Board of Education. Mandatory employees have already been notified of their status by their respective supervisors and primarily include personnel in school nutrition, transportation, ACES and other key departments. Mandatory employees are preparing and distributing meals, staffing the district’s three centers for the school-aged homeless children or children of local healthcare workers, or fulfilling other critical operational needs for the district.

Effective Wednesday, April 1, all mandatory hourly employees working on-site in GCS will be paid time and one-half for hours worked. Employees who are on leave or who have not reported to work are not eligible. The additional pay applies to both fulltime and part-time hourly, mandatory employees for the month of April. Superintendent Sharon L. Contreras, Ph.D., has authorized the additional pay in recognition of the vital work our employees are performing to limit child hunger in our county while also ensuring we have a functioning healthcare system and school district.

Additionally, nearly all classified employees are eligible for the new State of Emergency Leave. This leave can be used for a variety of reasons, including:

- Mandatory (essential) or non-mandatory employees who cannot work because they have childcare or eldercare needs due to COVID-19-related facility closings.
- Mandatory or non-mandatory employees who are sick due to symptoms consistent with COVID-19 or who are caring for a dependent with such symptoms, or who have been advised by a health care provider to self-quarantine due to concerns related to COVID-19.
- Mandatory or non-mandatory employees who cannot work because they are high-risk and who have not been assigned alternate telework (work at home) duties. High-risk employees are those over 65 years of age, those who have underlying health conditions

or a weakened immune system or who have been identified by state or federal health authorities as high risk.

- Non-mandatory employees who are unable to work remotely and who have not been assigned alternate telework (work at home) duties.
- Mandatory employees who have been assigned duties for only part of their regularly scheduled workday.

The State of Emergency Leave allows full-time employees to receive up to 168 hours of paid leave between April 1 and April 30. Those who requested or took their own available leave between March 16 and March 31 can receive up to 96 hours of paid leave time, if they meet the criteria and the leave was previously approved. This leave also may be applied to essential hourly staff who cannot work at home but were not allowed to work on-site this week by their supervisors and the district in response to the county and state “stay at home” orders. Part-time employees will receive pro-rated leave based on their typical hours. The leave act may be extended by the state board; we will let everyone know if that occurs.

If employees qualify for the State of Emergency Leave under these criteria, their supervisors, the payroll office and the benefits office will work to ensure that this leave is applied. If employees have already taken leave prior to the state board’s decision and are accepted for state of emergency leave, the leave time taken will be restored by the district. State of Emergency Leave also applies to custodians and other hourly workers who were not allowed to work-on site this week and cannot work from home.

The federal government also authorized the Families First Coronavirus Response Act, effective on April 2, 2020, which includes paid sick leave of 80 hours for full-time employees and a pro-rated number for part-time employees. To qualify, employees must be under a doctor’s care for COVID-19 or be responsible for a child or family member who is affected. The act also authorized additional leave for employees who have exhausted their Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) time during the past 12 months. This additional leave is at two-thirds the employee’s current rate of pay, following 10 days of unpaid leave, and is available through Dec. 31, 2020.

The district will first apply the State of Emergency Leave for employees who qualify from March 16 - April 30, 2020. The Families First Coronavirus Response Act leave will be available to qualified employees through December 31, 2020.

If employees have filed for unemployment benefits and are now eligible under the criteria (outlined above) to collect paid State of Emergency Leave, please take note of the following:

- Employees are not eligible to collect both unemployment benefits and paid State of Emergency Leave benefits.
- Employees qualifying for State of Emergency Leave benefits are disqualified from receiving unemployment benefits.
- Employees currently receiving unemployment benefits must complete a Weekly Certification for each week of benefits, or the employee will not receive unemployment benefits.

- Employees who were collecting unemployment benefits but now qualify under the State of Emergency Leave should be instructed to immediately log onto the DES website under “My Account” and navigate to Weekly Certification. The Weekly Certification is a list of yes/no questions. At the end of the certification there are two choices. Employee should check “I Do Not Wish to Certify.”
- Choosing “I Do Not Wish to Certify” should stop the weekly unemployment benefits that employees are payed directly.
- If employees receive both unemployment benefits and paid State of Emergency Leave benefits, they will be obligated to return the unemployment benefits back to the North Carolina Division of Employment Security.
- The Division of Employment Security website is **www.des.nc.gov**.

We appreciate everything our employees are doing to provide vital services to our students and their families. We are proud of you, and we’re proud of the way the GCS family is pulling together to support those in need. Please understand that public health guidance and government directives change rapidly, and GCS must change policies, practices and protocols as new information becomes available. As Dr. Anthony Fauci, the nation’s top coronavirus expert, has shared, the virus is controlling the timeline, and we must respond accordingly. We will continue to update you as new guidance or directives are issued.

Sincerely,

Angie Henry

Angie Henry
Chief Operations Officer

Dr. Shirley Morrison

Dr. Shirley Morrison
Chief Human Resources Officer

Enclosure: Frequently Asked Questions