



Matthew L. Blomstedt, Ph.D., Commissioner

NEBRASKA

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To: Nebraska Public School Superintendents, Non-Public School Administrators, & ESU Administrators
CC: State Board of Education, Commissioner's Cabinet and NDE Leadership

Good Evening-

I know there has been a lot of movement on the recent events and decisions about COVID-19. There is far more than happening than I can describe in this email.

NDE is taking the COVID-19 pandemic extremely seriously and is working each day with public health partners, schools, school associations, community partners, and many others. The examples internationally (Italy) and nationally (Washington) demonstrate the importance of decisions around the timing of social isolation measures such as closing schools.

It is widely believed that closures that happen too soon may result in more spread BUT closures that happen too late have the same impact. I am watching these situations and advocating for a clear protocol for the decisions around school closures. Schools across the nation/state need to be part of the strategy to protect public health and reset normal priorities to support students, families, neighbors, and communities. Nebraska will likely see exponential growth in COVID-19 in the next two months and protecting the key health systems from being overrun will save lives of our most vulnerable populations.

Tonight, I can say that there is a rapid increase in national, state and local awareness of the severity of the issues. As of 8:30 PM 3-12-2020, there are no known cases of community spread in Nebraska. UNLESS state or local health officials ask you to close, it is recommended that you hold school in your regular order. I believe there are community needs that your normal operations serve. HOWEVER, there are circumstances that schools have decided to close based on their own understanding of local community needs and I will try to support those decisions as well. I expect to have more guidance available from CDC and the Governor in the coming days. Although the spread of Coronavirus, is likely, I know the first strategy is to contain it as long as possible to make preparations that meet your community needs.

I do believe there is a likelihood that Nebraska and other states will experience many closures over the next weeks and months. However, I have asked the Governor, education leaders, and others to ensure an orderly and appropriate approach to closures that include recommendations from state and local health officials. The Governor will hold a press conference with me and a few other education leaders to discuss the circumstances, the protocols, the communication approaches and an approach to inform and improve decision making for the benefit of public health and safety.

To lead and support the preparation of all Nebraskans for learning, earning, and living.

I still believe that for most of the state, there is no additional risk to hold school tomorrow and we will continue to evaluate week by week and day by day the risks and make recommendations according to the best information possible.

As we proceed over the next days and weeks, do your best to help communities to follow common sense health recommendations to limit the spread of illness. You should send clear guidance to staff, parents and students to stay home if ill. All of the aforementioned non-pharmaceutical interventions (NPI) are proven to help the spread of such viruses. NDE will have regular updates and continue to advocate for what is best for the general health and well-being of our communities, schools, and dedicated educators like you.

Matthew L. Blomstedt,
Commissioner of Education