THE STATE of ALASKA
GOVERNOR MIKE DUNLEAVY

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MEMORANDUM

TO: **Alaska Public School Families and Staff**

FROM: **Dr. Michael Johnson, Commissioner**

DATE: **March 13, 2020**

SUBJECT: **Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) Planning and Preparatory Period for Alaska's Public Schools Starting March 16, 2020**

Out of an abundance of caution, and in an effort to do everything we can to help keep our school communities safe and help slow the spread of COVID-19, the Alaska Department of Education and Early Development (DEED) has determined that providing all school districts with a statewide, department-supported COVID-19 planning and preparatory period is warranted.

To that end, DEED is issuing the following directive to school districts:

- All scheduled school days starting Monday, March 16, 2020 through March 27, 2020 will be non-student contact days in which students will not be attending school. At this time, students will return on Monday, March 30, 2020.
- All after-school activities will be suspended during this time.
- During this time period districts will dedicate in-service days to fully organizing education plans for remote-delivered schooling should the need arise (except for days previously scheduled for spring break).
- During this time period schools will not be conducting regular class schedules.
- During this time period staff are directed to return to work after spring break.
- Guidance for residential programs is still being considered and will be communicated early next week.

Preserving student, staff, and community health and safety during the pandemic is DEED's first priority, and providing districts with the opportunity to focus fully on this priority is in the state's best interest.

This directive has been determined necessary after much deliberation with state health officials, school district leadership, and additional state educational leadership, and is consistent with the planning and preparatory actions of other state education departments in response to COVID-19.

COVID-19 is anticipated to be active within the United States for several months, and providing districts with the time to fully prepare for any outbreaks that may occur over this extended period is a proactive investment to ensure all of Alaska's schools can deliver quality education to students in the event of school closures.

Key Strategy Components

District and school personnel will be fully engaged in the following activities during these in-service days:

- Develop and test distance-delivered lessons that can be implemented for extended periods of time, if determined necessary.
- Fully sanitize all school facilities.
- Review and update all pandemic safety measures.
- Review, test, and practice Emergency Operation Plans (EOPs).
- Interface with local public health officials and health providers to establish and maintain active communication.
- Prepare and begin alternate non-congregate student meal delivery.

DEED will provide professional development to district/school staff on a collection of relevant topics, such as: distance-delivered education tools, pandemic preparedness and prevention, status updates on COVID-19 both nationally and in Alaska, support students with special needs and/or individualized education plans (IEPs), statewide assessments, etc.

DEED will work closely with each superintendent to fully consider the implications this decision will have on individual students with special needs, their local communities, and will partner with local leadership to make necessary adjustments that are in the best interest of Alaska's varied and unique communities.

DEED fully understands this action will significantly affect communities statewide, and is taking this historic step because the only expectation of public education that eclipses its responsibility to provide an excellent education for every student every day is to take all necessary steps to ensure the health and safety of every student every day.

DEED will continue to communicate with state health officials, school district leadership, and additional state educational leadership to review and adjust this directive as needed.