SBE Votes to Suspend Assessments, Accountability, Waive Missed School Days

NEWS RELEASE

For Immediate Release: March 19, 2020

JACKSON, Miss. – The Mississippi State Board of Education (SBE) voted today to suspend all federal and state assessments for the 2019-20 school year and to submit a waiver request to the U.S. Department of Education (ED) for exemption of those federal requirements.

As a result of the suspension of federal and state assessments, districts will retain the accountability grade for the 2020-21 school year that they received in the 2019-20 school year.

Additionally, the SBE affirmed Gov. Tate Reeves' executive order today to close schools statewide through April 17 in an effort to contain the spread of COVID-19 (coronavirus). As a result, the SBE voted to allow school districts to forego the requirement of a 180-day school year per state law for school closure due to COVID-19.

The governor's executive order follows his March 14 Declaration of a State of Emergency for the state of Mississippi, in which he asked schools to close March 16-20.

Dr. Jason Dean, SBE chairman, stated that "school buildings are closed to the general public but learning is not closed." He encouraged local school districts to continue learning opportunities for students during this time.

The Mississippi Department of Education (MDE) has issued guidance to school districts who want to implement distance learning. MDE has partnered with Mississippi Public Broadcasting to provide online learning opportunities for students. However, not all districts have the technology to fully and equitably conduct online learning, so the MDE will be releasing additional guidance for school districts in the coming days.

Some school districts have offered take-home packets of work for students and parents.

"I want to commend our superintendents, principals and teachers on efforts to provide instruction to students even while schools are closed," said Dr. Carey Wright, state superintendent of education. "I also want to recognize all district support staff who have stepped in to assist the students of their districts under these challenging circumstances."

MDE will submit a waiver to ED regarding suspension of assessments and accountability for the 2019-20 school year. The Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) is providing needed national leadership by working with ED on state waivers.

"I want to thank CCSSO for its leadership in working with the U.S. Department of Education on a potential waiver for states. CCSSO is leading in unprecedented times," Wright said.

The MDE will send guidance to districts on how to submit information on missed days.

Lawmakers passed legislation to authorize districts to pay all certified and non-certified staff during school closures due to the COVID-19 outbreak. Districts will continue to receive their monthly MAEP allocations.

The SBE's decisions will have implications for various MDE policies, and the agency will be evaluating those and making recommendations to the SBE at a special-called virtual meeting set for Thursday, March 26 at 10 a.m.

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