STATE OF MISSISSIPPI

Office of the Governor

EXECUTIVE ORDER NO. 1517

WHEREAS, on March 14, 2020, pursuant to the Constitution of the State of Mississippi and Miss. Code Ann. § 33-15-11(b)(17), I issued a Proclamation declaring that a State of Emergency exists in the State of Mississippi as a result of the outbreak of COVID-19; and

WHEREAS, on January 31, 2020, the United States Department of Health and Human Services Secretary Alex Azar declared a public health emergency for COVID-19 beginning on January 27, 2020, on March 11, 2020, the World Health Organization characterized COVID-19 as a pandemic, and on March 13, 2020, the President of the United States declared a nationwide state of emergency due to the coronavirus COVID-19 pandemic; and

WHEREAS, the worldwide outbreak of COVID-19 and the effects of its extreme risk of person-to-person transmission throughout the United States and Mississippi significantly impact the life and health of our people, as well as the economy of Mississippi; and

WHEREAS, on March 19, 2020, I issued Executive Order 1460, pursuant to Miss. Code Ann. §§ 33-15-11(c)(1) and (4), closing all Mississippi public schools through April 17, 2020 due to the COVID-19 emergency in order to minimize the interaction and risk of further transmission of COVID-19; and

WHEREAS, on March 26, 2020, the Mississippi State Department of Health announced new and expanded measures to increase testing and data analysis to identify regions and localities that are at higher risk for transmission of COVID-19 and to provide more location-specific restrictions and limitation of movement and social interaction to combat the virus in those regions and localities; and

WHEREAS, on April 22, 2020, I issued Executive Order 1476, pursuant to Miss. Code Ann. §§ 33-15-11(c)(1) and (4), closing all Mississippi public school buildings through the remainder of the 2019-2020 academic year due to the COVID-19 emergency in order to minimize the interaction and risk of further transmission of COVID-19; and

WHEREAS, on May 28, 2020, I issued Executive Order 1492 establishing the statewide Safe Return order to restart the economy, open all businesses and non-profits operating within the State of Mississippi, and permit the resumption of community activities subject to limitations to minimize person to person interactions and associated risk of transmission of COVID-19 effective 8:00 a.m. on Monday, June 1, 2020, and remaining in full force and effect until 8:00 a.m. on Monday, June 15, 2020; and

WHEREAS, the Safe Return instituted in Executive Order 1492, as amended and extended by Executive Orders 1496, 1500, 1505, 1508, 1511 and 1514 has been extended and remains in full force and effect until 8:00 a.m. on Monday, August 17, 2020, unless it is modified, amended, rescinded, or superseded; and

WHEREAS, I have joined the President of the United States, the members of the White House Coronavirus Task Force and the vast majority of medical experts in encouraging people to wear face coverings while in public spaces, and the Mississippi State Department of Health and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention have repeatedly emphasized that wearing face coverings in public spaces is one of the most important and effective tools for reducing the community transmission of COVID-19; and

WHEREAS, wearing a face covering is important not only to protect oneself, but also to avoid unknowingly harming our fellow Mississippians through the asymptomatic community transmission of COVID-19; and

WHEREAS, the key to reducing the community transmission of COVID-19 and keeping all Mississippi schools open is for all Mississippians to consistently wear a face covering while in public spaces, to practice social distancing from persons not in the same household and to maintain good hand hygiene; and

WHEREAS, in addition to wearing face coverings, the State Health Officer has reported certain jurisdictions and regions of the state that (a) indicate periods of higher numbers of new cases over shorter periods of time accounting for larger percentage of the State's overall case count, (b) have higher percent incidence of positive cases per number of tests performed, and (c) have other public health indicators reflecting an elevated rate of community transmission of COVID-19; and

WHEREAS, the counties identified by the State Health Officer that are at higher risk for community transmission of COVID-19 are Bolivar, Coahoma, Forrest, George, Hinds, Panola, Sunflower and Washington Counties; and

WHEREAS, in consultation with the State Health Officer, in order to slow the community transmission of COVID-19 in Bolivar, Coahoma, Forrest, George, Hinds, Panola, Sunflower and Washington Counties, it is necessary to delay the start of the 2020-2021 academic year for grades seven through twelve in these eight counties until Monday, August 17, 2020; and

WHEREAS, this brief delay to the start of the 2020-2021 academic year for grades seven through twelve will allow parents and guardians in these eight counties at a higher risk for community transmission of COVID-19 to monitor their children for symptoms of COVID-19, as well as to provide time for such children to remain at home or in another family environment with limited interaction with persons outside of their family, to practice social distancing and to wear face coverings while in public, all of which will decrease the risk of community spread of COVID-19 when school begins.

NOW, THEREFORE, I, Tate Reeves, Governor of the State of Mississippi, by the authority vested in me by the Constitution and laws of the State of Mississippi, and in consultation with the State Health Officer do hereby order and direct as follows:

I. Every person in Mississippi shall wear a face covering, covering the nose and mouth, while inside a school building or classroom, or when outdoors on a school campus whenever it is not possible to maintain a minimum of six feet of social distancing from another person not in the same household, except face coverings are not required for the following:

   a. Persons who cannot wear a face covering due to a medical or behavioral condition, who have trouble breathing or are incapacitated, or whose healthcare professional has recommended that a face covering not be worn;
   b. Persons seeking to communicate with someone who is hearing-impaired in a way that requires the mouth to be visible;
   c. Persons while eating or drinking;
   d. Persons in a building or engaged in an activity that utilizes or requires security surveillance or screening, and only during such times when these persons are under security surveillance or screening;
   e. Persons engaged in swimming activities or other activities while in a swimming pool;
   f. Persons engaged in exercising in fitness and exercise gyms or other sports activity;
   g. Persons engaged in organized school athletic practices, including weight training;
   h. Persons while giving a speech, presentation or performance for a broadcast or to an audience;
   i. Persons actively providing or obtaining access to religious worship (***NOTE*** wearing a face covering is strongly encouraged); and
   j. Children under the age of six (6) (***NOTE*** parents and guardians shall be responsible for ensuring proper use of face coverings by children six (6) years of age and older and must ensure that face coverings do not pose a choking hazard and can be safely worn without obstructing a child's ability to breathe.).

   This provision shall remain in full force and effect unless it is modified, amended, rescinded, or superseded.

II. That due to the COVID-19 emergency and the increased risk of community transmission of COVID-19 in Bolivar, Coahoma, Forrest, George, Hinds, Panola, Sunflower and Washington Counties, pursuant to Miss. Code Ann. §§ 33-15-11(c)(1) and (4), the power and authority of the local school boards in these eight counties to fix the date for the opening of the school term as provided in Miss. Code Ann. § 37-13-61 for grades seven through twelve is hereby suspended.

III. The start of the 2020-2021 academic year for public schools in Bolivar, Coahoma, Forrest, George, Hinds, Panola, Sunflower and Washington Counties for grades seven through twelve shall be delayed until Monday, August 17, 2020.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand and caused the Great Seal of the State of Mississippi to be affixed.

DONE in the City of Jackson, on the 4th day of August, in the year of our Lord, two thousand and twenty, and of the Independence of the United States of America, the two hundred and forty-fifth.

TATE REEVES
GOVERNOR

BY THE GOVERNOR

MICHAEL WATSON
SECRETARY OF STATE