News Release

March 16, 2020

NEBRASKA OFFERS GUIDANCE TO SCHOOLS REGARDING COVID-19

As the number of confirmed COVID-19 cases in the state rises, the Nebraska Department of Education (NDE) is sharing additional guidance on alternate learning environments, nutrition, and assessment. In all recommendations, the priority remains the safety and well-being of all students, educators, staff, and community members.

Alternate Learning Environments

By Monday, March 23, the NDE recommends that all schools across the state move to an alternate learning structure with students no longer reporting to a traditional school setting, until further notice. School districts should work regionally by educational service unit to develop an orderly plan to transition to an alternate learning environment by Friday, March 20, unless told to close sooner. Schools should be prepared to operate in the alternate learning environment for six-eight weeks, with a review of operations every two weeks, including plans for re-opening.

Local school districts have been preparing for potential closures for weeks and many have already implemented closures to address recent presumed positive or confirmed cases of COVID-19. The NDE advises districts to continue student learning using available resources. The NDE Office of Teaching, Learning, and Assessment has compiled virtual educational resources that are available on the e-Learning Days web page, and will continue to add resources as they become available.

Nutrition

The NDE knows food insecurity for students who rely on school meals is a major concern when extended school closures become necessary. The NDE was granted approval from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) for alternate meal service flexibility in the case of extended closures. This allows schools to serve students meals through USDA-approved meal service options, at approved sites within the community. All schools with a student population of more than 50 percent free and reduced priced lunch have the opportunity to provide meals through the Summer Food Service Program whether or not they have participated in the program. Those schools will first need to complete an application and questionnaire. Once approved, schools will be able to provide these meals to any student, regardless of their enrollment. Schools with a

student population of less than 50 percent free and reduced priced lunch can provide meals to low-income students in their school on a limited basis through an application. For more information or to apply, visit the Nutrition Services page at: https://www.education.ne.gov/ns/.

Assessment and Accountability

The NDE is aware of concerns regarding the state's assessment and accountability systems and the impact of COVID-19 and related closures on these policies. The NDE is suspending summative statewide assessment (NSCAS) for the 2019-2020 school year. This includes NSCAS – General, Alternate, and ACT. The NDE intends to pursue federal waivers for testing, accountability, and reporting requirements. The NDE is working with ACT to determine if all public high school juniors who would normally take the ACT as part of the statewide assessment may have the opportunity to take the ACT free-of-charge at a later date.

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