Burgum: K-12 schools will continue distance learning for remainder of school year as fight against COVID-19 continues

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BISMARCK, N.D. – Gov. Doug Burgum today announced his executive order (https://www.governor.nd.gov/sites/www/files/documents/executive-orders/Executive%20Order%202020-10.pdf) directing schools to provide education via distance learning will remain in effect through the end of the current school year to help slow the spread of COVID-19 and protect students, staff and communities.

Burgum ordered schools closed to on-site instruction on March 15, four days after the state identified its first case of COVID-19. That early and decisive action to prevent the state's 112,000 public school students and nearly 6,800 non-public school students from congregating on a daily basis likely prevented hundreds of additional cases of COVID-19, the governor said, noting the state has seen only 100 cases of COVID-19 in individuals under the age of 20, with only two hospitalizations.

Distance learning began across the state by April 1 as directed by the executive order.

"North Dakota has become a shining example of distance learning," Burgum said. "While some states simply shut down schools with no alternative to classroom learning, our teachers and administrators quickly developed plans to continue educating our students via creative combinations of online instruction and effective use of good old-fashioned books, reports and homework."

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Burgum said the decision to maintain distance learning was made after much deliberation and a tremendous amount of input from state Superintendent Kirsten Baesler and the North Dakota Department of Public Instruction, the state Department of Health and its physician advisors, school administrators, teachers, school board members, legislators, parents and students. He expressed gratitude for everyone involved in the effort, saying, "They have stepped up to do the impossible."

Maintaining distance learning through the end of the school year will help the state slow the spread of the coronavirus, manage risk, preserve hospital capacity and protect those most vulnerable to COVID-19 – the elderly and those with underlying health conditions, Burgum said.

The decision also allows school boards, administrators and teachers to focus on planning for summer school programs, resuming classroom instruction next fall, closing achievement gaps, identifying technology upgrades to further improve distance learning, and developing innovative education and personalized learning plans, Burgum noted, highlighting the opportunity to build upon the recommendations of the Innovative Education Task Force (https://www.governor.nd.gov/news/burgum-thanks-members-k-12-higher-education-task-forces-final-reports-and-recommendations) and the progress that has followed.

Additional guidance on graduation ceremonies will be provided soon, Burgum and Baesler said.

The North Dakota Department of Health today confirmed 40 additional cases of COVID-19 out of 2,065 tests – a record high number of tests in a single day for North Dakota. That bring the state's totals to 1,107 confirmed cases and 29,525 tests, ranking the state fourth in the nation for per capita testing. Four additional deaths of individuals with COVID-19 were reported today, for a total of 23 deaths since the pandemic began. Burgum extended his deepest condolences to their families and all those who have lost loved ones to COVID-19.

With 24 newly recovered cases today, the number of active cases in North Dakota increased by 12 to 602 active cases. Twenty-seven people are currently hospitalized.

For more information on the state's COVID-19 response, visit www.health.nd.gov/coronavirus (http://www.health.nd.gov/coronavirus) or www.ndresponse.gov (http://www.ndresponse.gov).

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