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North Carolina Department of PUBLIC INSTRUCTION

NC DPI

State Board Extends Emergency Sick Leave Policy; Cancels 2020 Governor's School

Raleigh

Apr 30, 2020

The N.C. State Board of Education took additional steps today in response to the state's continuing efforts to stem the COVID-19 pandemic.

Addressing the needs of school employees, the board approved an extension until May 31 of its emergency sick leave policy, which is allowing districts to continue to pay and provide benefits to eligible staff who cannot work remotely, who have child-care or elder-care needs, are at high risk of COVID-19 and others.

The board also approved the cancellation of this year's North Carolina Governor's School, a residential summer program for nearly 700 gifted and talented high school students from across the state, integrating academic disciplines, the arts, and unique courses on each of two campuses. The action represents the first time in the Governor's School 58-year history that the five-and-a-half week program will not be held.

The emergency sick leave policy, which the board initially approved March 27, provided relief to impacted school staff through April. Since schools were closed in mid-March in response to the COVID-19 event, the board and the Department of Public Instruction have encouraged all public schools to provide remote work options for their employees to help limit the spread of COVID-19 infection while also allowing the continuation of salary and benefits. The emergency leave policy has helped fill the gap for those employees who are unable to work remotely for various reasons.

Under the extension approved today, the maximum number of hours available to employees has been increased from 168 to 328.

The board had delayed a decision on the Governor's School in the hopes that it could continue with its scheduled start in late June.

But even with considered accommodations and date adjustments, the school leaders say in an announcement today, "proceeding with this close-knit residential program would improperly jeopardize student and faculty/staff health and safety during this period of necessary social distancing. Also, in-depth considerations have revealed that other content delivery means, [such as online and videoconference], would sacrifice program integrity and equity, offering inconsistent or no additional benefit to most students."

Sherry Thomas, director DPI's Exceptional Children division, which administers the summer program, said the decision to cancel this year's session was a difficult one.

"It is heartbreaking for us that we will not be able to hold Governor's School this year," Thomas told the board. "We regret that we have to do this, but we feel like we have no other option."

The Governor's School is the nation's oldest statewide summer residential program for gifted high school students. The program, which is open to rising seniors only, with exceptions made for rising juniors in selected performing/visual arts areas, has been located on two campuses of up to 335 students each: Governor's School West at High Point University (http://www.highpoint.edu/) in High Point, and Governor's School East at Meredith College (http://www.meredith.edu/) in Raleigh. The program is administered by the Public Schools of North Carolina, the State Board of Education and the Department of Public Instruction through the Exceptional Children Division.

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