DPI updates guidance for districts during COVID-19 school closures

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MADISON — The Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction today announced updated guidance to school districts regarding the continuity of learning amid the spread of COVID-19 and the closure of public and private schools.

The DPI will waive a state mandated hour requirement to districts requesting to do so during the ongoing public health emergency. Districts will still need to file a waiver, per state law, but the DPI will work to ensure an expedited process. Additionally, the DPI is asking Gov. Tony Evers to suspend a portion of the Wisconsin Administrative Code temporarily, so districts can use one simplified form and have it granted immediately. The DPI expects the process to be implemented through the coming weeks.

Additionally, the DPI is aggressively pursuing a waiver request to the U.S. Department of Education as it relates to mandated assessments. The DPI will work with the Wisconsin State Legislature and Gov. Evers around suspending state testing requirements this spring due to the unprecedented circumstances. Discussions will continue around the potential impact these policy changes have with regard to the DPI's annual Accountability Report Cards.

"The DPI is taking action to remove barriers that may be in the way of our schools and students during these trying times," State Superintendent Carolyn Stanford Taylor said. "I am proud of our schools and communities, who remain focused on providing continuity of learning, and providing meals and other resources to students who may need them."

Students from economically-disadvantaged families will also have access to school meals during school closures, as the DPI's requested Summer Food Service Program and Seamless Summer Option waiver to the U.S. Department of Agriculture was approved.

The waiver remits the requirement for SFSP and SSO meals during unexpected school closures and non-school sites, such as the one Wisconsin schools face during the spread of COVID-19. The DPI is also pursuing exemptions to regulations preventing districts from providing meals to

students. For more information on the school meal waiver process through school closures, visit the DPI's webpage (https://dpi.wi.gov/school-nutrition/child-nutrition-program-covid-19-information?fbclid=IwAR00q7gN_q73LX-tRafckeDINJrR3TLxPIIARxJTX-t3a_C0uHGrHShiMwU).

Through this unexpected closure of Wisconsin schools, many districts are providing services through virtual learning. Schools should make all reasonable efforts to provide students with disabilities equal access to the same opportunities. Upon the reopening of Wisconsin schools, local educational agencies must make every effort to implement individualized education plans, and should consider, on an individualized basis, whether and to what extent compensatory services are required.

The DPI is curating broadband and digital access resources for schools to leverage, and is continuously updating its website to help districts and educators planning to offer virtual learning opportunities. View the updates resources on the DPI's Virtual Learning Time Resources for Continuity of Learning webpage (https://dpi.wi.gov/cal/innovation/virtual-learning-time/district-planning-and-implementation-resources).

On March 13, Wisconsin Department of Health Services Secretary-designee Andrea Palm, under the direction of Gov. Evers, issued an order closing Wisconsin public and private schools, effective at 5 p.m. on March 18, 2020, and lasting through April 6, 2020. In response to the academic and economic impacts these school closures have, the DPI will implement policy changes which seek to eliminate challenges facing schools, educators, students, and families.

For the latest DPI updates on the spread of COVID-19 and how it relates to Wisconsin schools, visit the department's dedicated webpage (https://dpi.wi.gov/sspw/2019-novel-coronavirus), which is continuously monitored and updated.

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