Iowa schools to extend closures through end of school year

Date: Friday, April 17, 2020

Schools will continue voluntary and required continuous learning plans while school buildings are closed

DES MOINES – Gov. Kim Reynolds and the Iowa Department of Education announced today that all school districts and nonpublic schools will be closed for the remainder of the school year and will continue to offer continuous learning to mitigate the spread of COVID-19. This also includes the cancellation of spring sports activities.

“While I would like nothing more than to open up our schools and classrooms in May, we have to prioritize the health and safety of Iowans,” said Gov. Reynolds. “With our students at home, we must rely on continuous learning plans that are in place and prepare school districts for ‘Return to Learn’ in the fall. I greatly appreciate the work of Director Ann Lebo and all our school administrators, educators, and staff during this unprecedented time.”

The decision, which was announced today during Gov. Kim Reynolds’ press conference, is based on recommendations from the Iowa Department of Public Health to ensure the health and safety of Iowa students, teachers, school administrators and other school staff.

“Iowa teachers should be commended for how quickly they have transitioned from the classroom to online and distance learning,” said Iowa Department of Education Director Ann Lebo. “Our schools have really stepped up to the plate and worked hard to develop and implement continuous learning solutions in only a matter of weeks. We appreciate everything schools and families are doing to support children’s well-being while continuing to support their academic progress while school buildings are closed.”

The governor and the Iowa Department of Education also announced that the state of Iowa will:

- Waive instructional time requirements for the remainder of the 2019-2020 regularly scheduled academic year for schools that continue to provide continuous learning through one of two approved options, voluntary educational enrichment opportunities, required educational services, or a combination of the two.
- Require schools to submit a Return to Learn Plan to the Iowa Department of Education by July 1 outlining ways they will address disruptions to learning as a result of COVID-19. This could include summer school, enrichment activities or other opportunities to address the needs of learners.
- Waive the requirement that schools start no earlier than Aug. 23, allowing school districts and nonpublic schools to make local decisions about the length of their 2020-2021 academic year.

The governor had previously ordered schools to close through April 30. All of Iowa's 327 public school districts, as well as 179 nonpublic schools, currently offer continuous learning through one of the approved continuous learning options outlined above. Continuous learning encompasses a variety of approaches used to extend learning beyond brick and mortar buildings — online learning, e-learning, distance learning, including paper packets, and virtual learning.

School buildings will remain closed through the end of the school year except for approved meals site locations participating in the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Summer Food Service Program and those providing temporary emergency childcare.

An announcement on summer sports activities and when other school-sponsored activities can resume will be made by June 1.

For more information, visit the Iowa Department of Education's COVID-19 Guidance and Information webpage.

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- April 2021 (15)
- March 2021 (20)
- February 2021 (11)
- January 2021 (15)
- December 2020 (13)
- November 2020 (10)
- October 2020 (17)
- September 2020 (13)
- August 2020 (9)
- July 2020 (10)
- June 2020 (12)
- May 2020 (17)
- April 2020 (9)
- March 2020 (16)
- February 2020 (11)
- January 2020 (17)
- December 2019 (4)
- November 2019 (9)
- October 2019 (15)
- September 2019 (15)
- August 2019 (16)
- July 2019 (10)
- June 2019 (12)

- May 2019 (14)
- April 2019 (15)
- March 2019 (14)
- February 2019 (15)
- January 2019 (18)
- December 2018 (6)
- November 2018 (10)
- October 2018 (11)
- September 2018 (16)
- August 2018 (15)
- July 2018 (12)
- June 2018 (13)
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