MICHIGAN Department of Education

Press Release

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State Superintendent Promotes Additional Time Next Year to Help Students Address Foregone Learning in the Pandemic

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LANSING – Layering in additional learning time next year will help Michigan students address foregone learning during the pandemic, according to State Superintendent Dr. Michael Rice.

Dr. Rice shared his thoughts with state legislators during a joint meeting of the Senate Education and Career Readiness Committee and the House Education Committee Tuesday afternoon.

"Given the challenges to teaching and learning during the pandemic, students will need additional instruction time next school year," Dr. Rice said.

Dr. Rice noted that in-person instruction—for most children—is superior to education at a distance and given the pandemic, whether they were educated primarily at a distance or largely in person, most students will receive less instruction from March of last year through the end of this school year than in any similar period of their education.

"The current minimum number of days—180—was too low before the pandemic. It isn't close to that of high-performing nations," Dr Rice said. "Students and staff need more days next year coming out of the pandemic. The state legislature should raise the minimum number of days to underscore the need for more time."

As school districts begin to prepare for next year, Dr. Rice explained, they should layer in additional instructional time to meet specific student needs—especially vulnerable groups of students, including children with profound special needs, beginning English learners, and fledgling readers, among others who need more time.

"Some districts will need to add time for all of their students, above a statutorily raised state minimum," Dr. Rice said. "Some will need to add time for particular groups of students or for particular students. Some will need to do all three.

"Child by child, group by group, districts will have to reflect on what is needed and how to meet these needs. More time is the clearest need. Most have foregone it. Many will need to recoup it," Dr. Rice said.

Layered-in additional instructional time for students was one of several lessons learned from the pandemic that Dr. Rice shared with the committee members. He said Michigan cannot simply go back to a pre-pandemic normal, but must pivot to a new, better normal.

"We need to aspire to this higher goal for two reasons," he said. One, many of our children haven't learned as much as they should have in the last year and we have work to do to catch them up to where they should be and, two, we were improving schools in the years before the pandemic, with an understanding that we had a long way still to go."

Dr. Rice noted that home technology is not a substitute for in-person instruction for most children but can be a valuable support to in-person instruction.

Community partnerships with food banks, child care providers, libraries, and other youth-serving organizations have been critical during the pandemic and will continue to be needed to address foregone learning in school by students.

Children's social and emotional needs have received added attention during the pandemic, Dr. Rice said. The Michigan Department of Education has begun a social and emotional learning (SEL)/children's mental health network and allocated more than $7 million from its education equity fund for children's mental health to local school districts. Governor Whitmer and the state legislature allocated a similar amount for related services as well. Local school districts have engaged in SEL work this year more than ever before. Professional development needs to be broadened and deepened, with more staffing of social workers, counselors, nurses, and school psychologists to serve children properly.

"We also need to reduce our early elementary class sizes where educators are laying the literacy and math skill foundation that will be necessary for success as students continue in school," Dr. Rice said. "Nothing is more critical to the success of young people in school than literacy skills."

School funding is another critical issue, he said, with more sustainable and recurring funding needed to help lift up Michigan's long-established underfunding of public schools.

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