

Chairman Eric Davis Comments-

NC SBE Meeting: Wednesday, March 18th, 2020

- . . . As you know, last Saturday, Governor Cooper – after consulting with members of the State Board of Education and the Department of Public Instruction – ordered the closure of all K-12 public schools as instructional settings through the end of the month.
- That decision was the right step to protect the health and safety of North Carolinians. Even though closing schools for instruction was hard, we do not have the luxury of a wait-and-see approach. We do not want any rear-view mirror regrets.
- Educators, students, and families – like all others across North Carolina and our country – are adjusting to COVID-19 pandemic. We are all reorganizing our work and family lives, taking precautions, and making sacrifices. As the circumstances continue to evolve, we may all be asked to do more and take even more precautions.
- This Board extends its support and gratitude to our front-line medical workers and first-responders. These workers are critical to responding to this pandemic and we thank them for taking care of us, our families, and our neighbors.
- During these unprecedented times, this Board and our state leaders know that we need to take steps to protect our most vulnerable students and citizens. We are working diligently with partners across government to help keep our children safe and healthy.
- And we know that educators are going to be called upon to act, and serve, and teach in new ways as this health emergency unfolds.
- We call on our valued teachers – who will continue to be paid during this crisis, even as some of their neighbors lose jobs – to be flexible. And to be innovative. And to continue to serve their students.
- We are going to have work hard to help mitigate the impacts of school closure. This will be difficult. We are cognizant of the equity issues that challenge our public school system even on the best days. The Department, this Board, local school leaders, and teachers are committed to doing all we can to continue to make learning and instructional opportunities available for all students.
- As we embark into this uncharted territory, we continue to work with the Governor, General Assembly, DPI, DHHS and other partners to remove barriers and provide guidance in effectively implementing the school closure decision.

- As such, the past 2 days, district and school leaders have received correspondence from me and the Superintendent providing guidance on the facilities and personnel matters outlined in the Governor's executive order 117.
- To reiterate, as a reminder, the March 16, 2020 memorandum states "weekdays between March 16 to March 30, 2020 are to be designated by default as "optional teacher work days" for employees. All staff remain in work status and are eligible to be paid. Local boards of education have the flexibility to designate days during the school closure period as mandatory teacher workdays or annual leave days. School districts may also exercise their local authority and rearrange their school calendar and designate days as annual leave days as needed. To the extent feasible, local boards of education and school leaders should provide opportunities for employees to work remotely during the school closure period and/or reassign employees to safe work environments with appropriate assigned tasks."
- Regarding remote work, school districts should allow employees to work remotely to accomplish assigned tasks and those employees are eligible to be paid. Given the sudden closure decision, we recognize that districts' level of preparedness and ability to implement remote work varies across our state. Some districts can implement immediately, others need to take steps to implement remote work. We encourage districts to move as quickly as feasible and to share with us issues that impact their ability to implement remote work. All decisions about work performed at schools or remotely should be made in the context of public health guidance and in accordance with the Governor's guidance regarding the size of gatherings.
- While difficult, this is an opportunity for all our public schools to exercise flexibility and creativity with developing effective/efficient plans to ensure the needs of every student is met during this most difficult time.
- We will work diligently to provide unified, clear messages to help with effectively responding to your needs.
- DPI Leadership has provided important, valuable information on topics such as Digital Learning, Exceptional Children, CTE support, Financial and Business Services, Curriculum and Instruction and many more. We thank the DPI staff for their continued and tireless dedication. . .