

March 10, 2021

Superintendent Truitt's Remarks as Prepared for Joint Announcement on School Reopening

It's an honor to be standing with you all on this beautiful day.

Everyone watching this press conference has a story to share about the past 12 months and the impact COVID has had on your life, and we will be sharing those stories for decades to come. Some will be of resiliency and heroism, but others will be marked by hardship and sadness.

My own story includes watching our three children experience isolation from sports, friends, and academics. Like many parents, I've been worrying about the extent to which they are falling behind academically, the missed opportunities for teenagers that come with being in class every day, but most of all, we worry about their mental health. If I, as a former teacher and state leader in education have these worries, I can only imagine how difficult and exhausting this has been for others.

Just when I think I've gotten my head around all of our state's education challenges, I learn something new that totally changes how I see things. Yesterday, I met with the superintendents of the southeast region of our state. Between three major hurricanes and 1 pandemic, if you are a fifth grader in one of those 11 counties, you have not had an uninterrupted year of learning since kindergarten. But they soldier on.

Like a slow-moving hurricane, COVID-19 has wrought havoc, leaving untold damage in its wake. So, much like our friends in the Southeast, we will begin the hard work of recovering from this disaster. And North Carolina's COVID story WILL be one of resiliency and heroism. We WILL find new ways to continue to support our local districts and communities so that students can get what they need to be successful post-pandemic.

And this recovery starts today, thanks to these leaders here. We are sending a clear message that for students, the cost is too great and the loss too large to prevent our middle and high school students from attending school five days per week.

I want to thank Senator Berger, Speaker Moore, and Senator Ballard, and Governor Cooper, and Deputy Secretary Susan Gale Perry for their tireless efforts to get us to this point today as we work to get students back in the classroom full time. I'm glad to see science prevail and state leaders transcend party lines for the sake of our communities.

Today's decision is about restoring choice to parents, to students, and providing greater flexibility to school districts. Today is about putting our students first.