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April 21, 2020

Dear Superintendents and BOCES Directors,

Thanks to all of you who were able to join the conversation this morning with Gov. Jared Polis. We had a good discussion about the continuation of remote learning through the end of the school year, the state budget, graduation and other topics. I know the tight turnaround from yesterday's invitation to this morning's call didn't allow all of you to participate, so I will attempt to provide a summary of the conversation here. If you have questions, please reach out to your Field Services representative.

- First and foremost, the governor and I both thank you from the bottom of our hearts for your work supporting students. Your strength, creativity, and passion for children and families is keeping our state going during this difficult time. Please convey our thanks to your educators for their dedication, problem-solving and creativity in rising to the occasion so quickly. The governor and I are both hearing from parents who are incredibly grateful to their children's teachers and to you for transforming education and supporting our kids.
- Under the [Safer at Home plan announced by the governor yesterday](#), the suspension of normal in-person learning at schools will continue for the remainder of the scheduled school year. The governor hopes schools will reopen in the fall with social distancing and other guidelines in place. However, because we aren't totally sure what is to come, districts should plan for two scenarios - opening in the fall with new health protocols in place, and continuing with remote learning in the fall.
- We spent a lot of time talking about commencement ceremonies, and I want to acknowledge that I hear the heartbreak among students and families about having to change or postpone this incredibly important milestone in their lives. The governor said he believes any type of commencement ceremony will be difficult to pull off safely this spring. He recommended postponing ceremonies to a later date, but also said it is possible to work with local public health departments to develop a substantially revised ceremony, with social distancing in place, to mark the occasion this spring. If communities want to preserve their traditional graduation ceremonies, the governor said it wouldn't be likely those could be held until fall at the earliest.
- The governor's administration is preparing best practices for the fall. He will continue to stay in touch with superintendents, so your thoughts can inform policies, waivers and other actions you need.
- The legislature will return in May, and we will have a better sense of the state budget in late May. He understands that not knowing what the budget will look like at this time makes it difficult to plan for next fall. He and legislators understand there should be no unfunded mandates on districts associated with new protocols that may be required for the COVID-19 response.



- As you are supporting students with remote learning, please contact your Field Services representative or Support Coordinator at CDE if you have challenges that you are not able to overcome. They will brainstorm with you and connect you with state resources that can help.
- CDE is working on guidance for summer school and other “catch up” programs as well as considerations for reopening in the fall. CDE will be reaching out to superintendents to get feedback on that guidance before it is finalized.
- The most recent [special edition of the CDE Update](#) includes guidance on data collections, PSAT/SAT, and waivers the state board may need to grant. CDE is working hard to clear the path for you, so you can focus on meeting the needs of your students and educators.

Summary of comments and questions from superintendents:

- Educators have stepped up during this crisis and the state needs to prioritize education in the budget. The governor was asked to prioritize education.
- Summer is a busy time for districts. When will guidance be available to inform planning for summer? The governor said guidance will be out in the next few weeks.
- Can schools plan a graduation ceremony similar to the recent Air Force Academy graduation? The governor recommended working with your local public health agency to decide if something like this would be okay in your community. CDE is putting together graduation ideas and plans we’ve gathered from districts and will share that soon.
- Funding for rural systems is absolutely critical. Please consider prioritizing this in the budget.
- When is the earliest a traditional graduation ceremony could take place? The governor said fall would be the earliest it could possibly happen.
- Please begin thinking about changes to the accountability system given the lost learning this spring. The governor expects that with your remote learning strategies, students will begin next year at grade level. (CDE is aware of these concerns and is thinking about this as well. As we learn more about what school will look like in 2020-21, CDE will request feedback, ideas and considerations for the accountability system from you all and other stakeholders.)
- Is there a way for schools in communities with low infection to resume instruction with social distancing? The governor said normal in-person learning is suspended for the rest of the school year, but it is possible to support special education students and other students in a one-on-one setting. CDE staff are happy to talk through some of the ways to meet students’ needs while protecting their health and the health of your educators.

Again, my thanks go out to each of you for all of your work, and for your partnership during this difficult time. We will continue to update you with information and guidance as soon as it is available, and we will keep the lines of communication open through opportunities like the one this morning.

Katy Anthes, Ph.D.
Commissioner

