

Matthew L. Blomstedt, Ph.D., Commissioner

www.education.ne.gov
301 Centennial Mall South
P.O. Box 94987
Lincoln, NE 68509-4987
TEL 402.471.2295
FAX 402.471.0117



NEBRASKA

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

March 29, 2020

John Spatz ,Executive Director
Nebraska Association of School Boards
1311 Stockwell Street
Lincoln, Nebraska 68502
jspatz@NASBonline.org

Re: Message to NASB School Board Membership on the Current COVID-19 Crisis

Dear Mr. Spatz and Nebraska School Board Association members:

Thank you for your service to your communities, schools, students, and families. We find ourselves in trying times across the nation and Nebraska as we confront this COVID-19 pandemic. As you know, this health crisis has already dramatically affected our sense of normal. At this time, Nebraska is just at the beginning of the health crisis. I have called on all school districts and communities to be part of the solution as we lead in a fight against the spread of this virus.

I continue to meet with state and local public health officials and speak with the Governor, his Chief of Staff, or his Chief Medical Officer every day (sometimes multiple times per day). It is clear that we are only beginning this public health emergency and it is critical that local leaders understand the important role they play at this time. There are quickly-developing recommendations and requirements nearly each day. I ask you to be attentive to such recommendations and directives.

Just to highlight, my recommendations for schools remaining in an alternate/remote learning environment for the remainder of the year will be supported by the Governor. He has shared the feeling that schools should remain operating without students in their buildings until state and local health officials support reopening as normal. In the Governor's press conference on Friday, March 27, the Governor reaffirmed his commitment to support this recommendation. The Governor stated that he prefers leaders use common sense and follow the recommendation as he maintains a focus on his plan to roll out Directive Health Measures (DHMs) across the state with local public health officials.

(Page 1 of 2)

Just this weekend you will note that the Governor added Hall, Merrick, Hamilton, York, Seward, Butler, and Polk counties to the list. This is in addition to the existing DHM orders in Douglas, Sarpy, Cass, Washington, Saunders, Dodge, and Lancaster counties. Nebraska will likely continue to see more orders by the Governor in the coming days and weeks as positive community spread cases are identified. School facility closures to students are part of the broader efforts to limit large gatherings of people in any location as a strategy to slow the spread of the virus.

I occasionally hear from some areas of the state that they do not believe they are impacted. This belief is NOT an accurate understanding of the risk of the spread of the virus. Every county in Nebraska will experience community spread. School board members, as community leaders, will need to be attentive to their local needs even beyond their normal student and family support. Additionally, school officials should be on the forefront of explaining the need for social distancing, taking proper hygienic precautions, and ensuring that gatherings are limited to the state and local health recommendations, guidelines, or orders.

I encourage local leaders to pay attention the DHHS website <http://dhhs.ne.gov/Pages/Coronavirus.aspx>. I also advise that Nebraskans become and remain aware of the circumstances in Colorado and neighboring states as the spread of the virus does not care about state boundaries. See <https://covid19.colorado.gov/> to understand that the virus spread in Colorado is growing exponentially. Regular traffic between Nebraska and Colorado in March has already led to the spread of the virus in Nebraska communities. I also believe it is prudent to be attentive to all of our neighboring states' experiences to date. There are plenty of reasons to be concerned and local leaders should continue to be vigilant in their efforts over the next few weeks and months.

We face one of the greatest challenges of our lifetime. The very community and human connections that we hold dear serve as vulnerabilities to spreading this virus further. A few short weeks ago I could not have imagined the threat was so real. At that time, I, perhaps like some of you, did not have a high level of concern. I think that we are lucky to have witnessed and learned from other places around the country. Our responsibility is now to respond as swiftly and decisively as possible to slow it down.

I personally thank you for your service at this time and look forward to one day celebrating on the other side of this pandemic crisis.

Sincerely,



Matthew L. Blomstedt, Ph.D.
Commissioner of Education