



STATE OF MICHIGAN
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
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GOVERNOR

MICHAEL F. RICE, Ph.D.
STATE SUPERINTENDENT

MEMORANDUM

DATE: July 24, 2020

TO: Local and Intermediate School District Superintendents
Public School Academy Directors

FROM: Michael F. Rice, Ph.D., Superintendent of Public Instruction 

SUBJECT: State Superintendent's Update Memo

Below please find updates and reflections in three broad areas about which a number of you have inquired recently.

Additional Federal Funding and the Relationship to the State Budget. There is movement on this issue. Unlike in May, when we as educators began our push nationally for additional federal funding, Senate Majority Leader McConnell has acknowledged that another coronavirus bill is necessary. There are active discussions in the capital about the shape of this new bill. Senate Republicans are currently proposing \$70 billion nationally for pre-K-12 education, while Senate Democrats are proposing \$200 billion. Both are greater than the \$58 billion in the HEROES Act, passed by the U.S. House weeks ago but immediately rejected by the U.S. Senate.

In addition to the aforementioned, there is significant discussion about increases in Title I and IDEA funding, as well as e-rate reimbursement.

While this news is welcome, there is still substantial uncertainty about the amount, timing, and flexibility of, and strings attached to, any new federal funding. **Count no unhatched chickens.** If you have been lobbying members of our Congressional delegation, thank you for your effort; you need to continue. Without substantial additional federal funding, state cuts to our districts will likely be large and lamentably adversely affect children, and staff, in the coming school year. **Now is the time to make your voices heard.**

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COVID-19 Preparedness and Response Plans. As you work on your preparedness plans, it is critical that you engage staff members and union leadership, as well as parents, in your work. It is *vitaly important* to get the best thinking from your internal and external communities in your planning. This is not simply about the preparation of the plan on the front end. It is about modifications to and execution of the plan throughout the year.

You are trying to balance public health and public education needs in a pandemic. There are no perfect plans or solutions in a pandemic—only the best collaborative plan you can develop at any given time. Staff and community members are legitimately anxious and in some cases fearful about the return to school. There is a wide range of opinions of what should take place instructionally within communities, let alone across communities within the state. What makes sense in one community may not make sense in a community in another part of the state—or even next door. Similarly, within many districts, you will need to serve children in different ways.

Some of the differences within school communities are evident. Some parents will send children back to schools and others will not. With different parents and children expressing different needs, it will be necessary to educate and serve children both at a distance and in person in many communities. Beyond this difference, though, you may decide that there is a benefit to using different instructional delivery models for different schools—or different levels of schooling. As you reflect on what makes best sense in your community in terms of the current health risks for your children and families—please consider especially how you will serve your most vulnerable students and your youngest students, those in elementary schools who are pre-readers, emerging readers, or fledgling readers, especially if you are considering the possibility of educating—or have made the decision to educate—children at a distance.

Parents' decisions not to send their children to school represent both a challenge and an opportunity for local school districts. On the one hand, you will have to educate children with different instructional delivery systems. On the other hand, the reduction in students in schools will help with distancing and other mitigation efforts.

Some of you have shared that you hope to educate children at a distance for the first few months and then re-assess the situation. While your community's health numbers may dictate this decision and while I agree with the need to re-assess regularly these numbers, the beginning of the school year—prior to a second wave and prior to flu season—may be the most likely time, *all else being equal*, to have in-person instruction in the coming school year.

When the first COVID-19 cases were announced in March, and the governor quickly shut down schools for in-person instruction, I shared with you the need to do the best you could in the midst of the pandemic. I also shared that the expectations for public schools would be greater in the fall than in the spring, given that we would have had time to learn more about the pandemic and to prepare better. In response, with local dollars and with CARES Act funds, you have purchased technology—devices, and in some districts, hotspots. You have trained staff, students, and in some cases parents. Teachers and administrators have reflected upon how they can best deliver instruction, both in person and at a distance. We have figured out how to feed children and to offer child care in the pandemic. Notwithstanding the profound uncertainties that exist and will in some cases exist throughout the coming school year, we are better prepared for the fall than we were for the advent of the pandemic in the spring.

State Legislative Work. Along with the state's education organizations—including those that represent many of you (MASA, MAISA, Middle Cities, and MAPSA)—MDE has lobbied the state legislature for clarity about next year around days, hours, attendance, and enrollment. Specifically, MDE has supported no change in the minimum number of days (180), a waiver of the minimum annual hour requirement (1,098) given that many children will be at a distance and should not be subject to the same number of hours online as they are in person, a waiver of the 75 percent daily attendance law, and the use of the 2019-20 membership count (enrollment) as the 2020-21 membership for each district. At the writing of this memorandum, the legislature has not finalized its work on these areas.

Many of you are proceeding in your work with the presumption that your membership counts for the upcoming school year will be what they were in 2019-20 or, if not, will be largely similar to what they were in 2019-20. Because of the enormous uncertainty heading into and through this pandemic-focused school year, many education organizations and MDE have advocated for a de facto hold harmless in enrollment: a carryforward of enrollment from 2019-20 to 2020-21. That said, the legislature has not signaled agreement on this concept, and indeed the House legislation on the subject assumes that the 2020-21 blended count will be a fresh one from 2019-20. If this proves to be the case, those of you making plans to serve children in only one way during the pandemic may find that your loss of children is manifested in a significant loss of revenue. I hope that this is not the case—and I have lobbied against this possibility—but it could be the case. I encourage you to factor in this possibility and not to put all your students in the same instructional delivery basket, given the very different feelings of different parents and students about their educational and health needs in the coming school year.

Just as I shared with you on federal funding, so too is it the case with these state legislative issues: ***now is the time to make your voices heard***. The House passed a series of bills this week related to the aforementioned issues and others for the 2020-21 school year. I encourage you to read closely the summaries from your associations on these bills and to reach out quickly to your legislators to share your own reflections. While a full analysis of the bills approved in the House is beyond the purpose of this memorandum, suffice it to say that the bills do not provide us with the requisite conditions under which to educate our children in the coming school year. If you agree, you should be saying so—now—to your legislators. To do nothing at this moment is assent.

I will share additional thoughts soon on the above issues.

Thank you for your continued leadership and partnership. Stay healthy, stay strong!

cc: Michigan Education Alliance
Confederation of Michigan Tribal Education Directors