

March 16, 2020

## UEN Comments Regarding COVID-19 School Closures and Relief of Mandated Days and Hours

Schools are the gathering place of the community, with hundreds if not thousands of students, parents, staff, vendors, and volunteers entering our buildings every day. Our parents and staff are concerned and anxious about the community spread of COVID-19 accelerating across our communities and no doubt, if we hold school, there will be staff and students with very light or no symptoms who will infect others, sending the virus across our communities.

As the Governor has now suggested schools close for 30 days, and as that may only be the start of the impact, school leaders are now very concerned about meeting the minimum requirements of instructional hours or days in the 2019-20 school year. This stress is compounded by school districts which already have make-up days do to winter closings.

School Administrators of Iowa has suggested a tiered approach to determine how many days or hours of instruction are required to complete the school year. Prior to the Governor's announcement last night that suggest schools close for 30 days, SAI suggested Tier I would reduce the number of hours required from 1,080 to 1,000, which is about 2.5 weeks of school based on a 6-hour day of instruction. Tier II would then kick in if additional days were missed, decreasing hours from 1,000 to 920, which is about 5 weeks of school. And additional tiers would kick in as additional days were missed. Given the closing of school of 30 days, we will likely start with Tier II and move on from there.

Members of the Urban Education Network do not take this suggestion lightly. Our essential purpose is to educate students. We are aware that our students need safe places to be during the day. Many students depend on school breakfast and lunch for much of their daily caloric intake. Some schools or classes may be able to consider online learning when school does not take place in a brick and mortar environment, yet current law does not allow for such a substitution; schools cannot pay staff for online teaching and have to make up that day at school later. The economic disruption of loss of income for hourly employees would be a hardship. UEN schools will do everything in our power to address these issues.

Lastly, ending one school year without a break and starting the next, which would likely be required with 30 or more days of make-up time, would have a domino impact on courses that teachers take to keep current on licensure, on high school seniors heading off to college, on families who have planned travel (assuming that even rebounds by summer), and other summer learning opportunities.

With so much on the plate of the Governor and Executive Branch leaders and the Legislature, we appreciate the difficult decisions ahead. Please consider and support a one-time waiver of the mandated hours/days of instructional time during this extraordinary time. Thank you for your leadership decision to keep our students, staff and their families safe.

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