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Date: Sun, Mar 15, 2020, 8:46 PM
Subject: On the Desktop 3 15 20 Suspending K12 Operations
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*News from Commissioner Jeffrey C. Riley & the MA Department of
Elementary and Secondary Education*

On the Desktop – March 15, 2020

Elementary and Secondary Schools: Suspend Educational Operations from March 17 Until April 7

Dear Superintendents, Charter School Leaders, Assistant Superintendents, Principals, and Private School Leaders,

Given the evolving data regarding cases of COVID-19, and out of an abundance of caution for the health and safety of children and school staff, the Governor has ordered a three-week suspension of school operations for educational purposes at all public and private elementary and secondary (K-12) schools in the Commonwealth (not including residential and day schools for special needs students), beginning Tuesday, March 17 and continuing until Tuesday, April 7. The suspension of educational programming will not necessarily affect the availability of school buildings for the provision of food or other essential non-educational services. As we approach April 6, we will provide additional guidance.

During this period, it is critical that students and their families, as well as school staff, stay home as much as possible. If you leave your home, it is essential to strictly follow social distancing guidelines by avoiding crowds, canceling social gatherings, and maintaining a safe separation of at least 6 feet from others. Restricting access to school buildings will have little impact on public health if these best practices are not followed in good faith.

Although schools must suspend in-person educational operations, staff should be planning for how best to equitably provide alternative access to student learning opportunities during this period and potentially beyond. Equally important, school personnel should develop plans for ensuring to the greatest extent possible that families have access to essential non-academic services for their children -- especially involving special education and food services for students who are most vulnerable.

The Department will work in partnership with schools and districts to develop strategies and resources to sustain learning and vital services throughout this closure period. Already, DESE has received a partial waiver from the U.S. Department of Agriculture providing greater flexibility regarding food service in certain districts with higher concentrations of low-income students and is actively pursuing additional waivers for the remaining schools and districts.

Sincerely,

Jeffrey C. Riley

Commissioner