



NEWS RELEASE

Utah State Board of Education

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March 12, 2020

For Immediate Release

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State Superintendent's Statement on Coronavirus and Utah's Public Schools

SALT LAKE CITY – “Safety for our students and the adults who serve them, is our priority. That means their health and well-being, along with continued education is on the forefront of our minds,” said State Superintendent of Public Instruction Sydnee Dickson. “Right now – we are transitioning from getting ready for the possible, to getting set for the probable, however, we are not making a statewide decision to close K-12 schools due to COVID-19 at this time.”

A decision to close any school is a local decision that is coordinated through the state. Local health departments and the Utah Department of Health are the organizations empowered by Utah law to close schools to protect public health. District and charter schools throughout the state are working with their local health departments in monitoring the situation and taking action based on those observations.

The Governor's Coronavirus Task Force, in coordination with all 14 local health departments to make the following recommendations to schools:

- Cancellation of all school-related out-of-state travel for the next two weeks.

Additional recommendations include:

- Postpone or cancel mass gatherings, which may include school assemblies, activities, and athletic games and functions.
- Consider staggering recesses and lunches to reduce the number of children in one place at one time.
- Consider staggering start times and dismissal times to reduce the number of children in one place at one time.
- Amplify health and hygiene prevention measures including staying home if you are ill, washing your hands thoroughly and often, and covering your nose or mouth when you sneeze or cough.

“We want to make sure that we do not close schools unless there is an imminent threat to our children and the adults who serve them,” Dickson said. “Our situation is different than that of higher education. While many of our schools can implement distance learning through digital means, we are not capable of a full transition statewide for K-12 at this time. Additionally, not having K-12 children in school puts weight on families whose parents work during the day, or for those in which childcare is not an option. It is a different type of social and economic impact that we are not taking lightly.

“To all district and charter schools: Please do not attempt to close a school unless your local health officer is directing you to do so. Closing a school out of anxiety or fear, and not because a health officer deems it necessary, can have ripple effects, not just throughout your immediate community, but throughout the entire state.

“We have complete confidence in our local school leaders, local health departments, and communities to work together to make the best decisions for their students and educators,” Dickson said.

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