



# PUBLIC SCHOOLS OF NORTH CAROLINA

STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION | Eric C. Davis, Chairman

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## Via Email Only

March 20, 2020

Mr. Mark D. Jewell, President  
North Carolina Association of Teachers  
700 South Salisbury Street  
Raleigh, NC 27611-7347

Dear President Jewell:

Thank you for your thoughtful letter on March 18, 2020 concerning Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19). And I appreciate the opportunity today for Vice Chair Duncan and I to discuss these issues with you and Rachele Johnson, your Executive Director. My colleagues and I on the State Board of Education have received numerous inquiries from educators about this public health emergency this week, and I want to thank the North Carolina Association of Educators for formally sharing with us some of the concerns and questions that teachers have during this uncertain time. As expressed on our call, we welcome your continuous feedback and partnership as we work together for the benefit of our students and teachers during this crisis.

The COVID-19 public health emergency is unprecedented in our country's history. Our state government is taking measured, difficult steps to provide for the health, safety, and welfare of North Carolina residents – even as the facts of this global pandemic change hour by hour. Governor Cooper consulted with State Board of Education members and Department of Public Instruction leaders before issuing Executive Order No. 117, which directed the closure of the state's K-12 public schools as instructional settings through the end of the month. Even though that was a difficult decision, it was the right one to protect the health and safety of North Carolinians. Additional precautions may be necessary in the coming weeks and months.

Understandably, teachers – like their neighbors and family members in other professions – have numerous work-related questions while schools are closed for instruction. The State Board, Office of the Governor, and the Department of Public have issued guidance to districts on the questions you have raised. That guidance says definitively that school employees are eligible to be paid if they work. Local superintendents have been encouraged to reassign employees, including hourly employees, with appropriate tasks to keep staff working.

Our guidance states that to the extent feasible, local boards of education and school leaders should allow employees to work remotely to accomplish assigned tasks. To the extent school leaders direct employees to come to school facilities, such directions should be made in accord with the most current public health directives from the state and federal governments. Decisions about facility use are fact-specific, and the State Board passed a resolution at an emergency meeting on Saturday night that, among other things, “encourage[s] school leaders to work with local health departments, NCDHHS, and other public health

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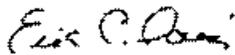
leaders to coordinate continuity plans concerning facility access and facility use.” In short, though closed to students for instruction purposes, our school buildings remain vitally important. Teachers may require facility access to make contingency plans for instruction and remote learning. School kitchens are necessary for cooks to prepare free or reduced-cost meals for our most vulnerable citizens. Some schools will serve as locations for providing childcare for frontline medical workers and first-responders who are responding to the medical crisis.

Please know that we have already been in frequent contact with state and federal legislators to discuss legislative solutions to mitigate the impacts of COVID-19 on students, school employees, and teachers. The State Board and DPI are also looking at ways to adjust Board rules and policies to help schools and educators. We will vigorously continue these efforts and welcome your feedback and suggestions.

We will continue to strive to deliver clear and responsive guidance as future decisions are made in this rapidly evolving situation. And we will expect education leaders at all levels to clearly communicate with employees in implementing the guidance.

Finally, please know that we deeply value our North Carolina teachers, who are going to be called upon to act, and serve, and teach in new ways as this health emergency unfolds. We know that our teachers will do all they can to continue to make learning and instructional opportunities available for all children. Thank you for your ongoing commitment to students and your patience and flexibility during this challenging time.

Sincerely,



Eric C. Davis  
Chair, North Carolina State Board of Education

cc: SBE Members