

Education Minnesota

Education Minnesota praises planning break for Minnesota schools

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ST. PAUL, Minnesota. March 15, 2020 – Minnesota schools will be closed to students by Wednesday and through March 27 so educators can prepare for distance learning and administrators can work through the challenges of closing schools for an extended period if needed in response to the coronavirus outbreak, Gov. Tim Walz ordered Sunday.

“No matter where we live or what we look like, we all want our kids to keep learning and growing through this difficult time,” said Denise Specht, president of Education Minnesota. “That can only happen if educators are given some time to use their training and experience to transform classroom lessons into distance learning. Gov. Walz is recognizing the complexity of the educators’ work with this preparedness period.”

The planning time will also give classroom educators and administrators time to figure how to provide vital services, including food, mental health services and other student supports, if public health officials recommend that schools close to staff and students for weeks or months this spring.

“Public schools play a complicated and crucial role in the smooth functioning of every community in the state,” Specht said. “Minnesota’s educators are problem solvers, community leaders and ready to step up. We will keep students and ourselves safe. We will do our part in our communities as we face this unprecedented situation. It’s what we do every day.”

Specht encouraged the members of the Minnesota Legislature to follow the governor’s advice to use the preparedness break to do their own work on the pandemic, including a bill that would require districts to pay their hourly workers if school buildings are closed. The bill, SF4369/HF4415, is similar to recent legislation mandating how districts pay their hourly employees on snow days.

“Now more than ever, this virus has shown us that we depend on each other, whether we’re white, black, Latino, Asian, Native American or newcomer,” Specht said. “It’s not fair to ask the hourly workers in schools, who are more likely to be people of color, to lose their paychecks if school buildings are closed. The districts receive the same state funding either way. Only by standing united with all Minnesotans can our state ensure everyone’s well-being through this anxious time.”

About Education Minnesota

Education Minnesota is the voice for professional educators and students. Education Minnesota’s members include teachers and education support professionals in Minnesota’s public school districts,

faculty members at Minnesota's community and technical colleges and University of Minnesota campuses in Duluth and Crookston, retired educators and student teachers. Education Minnesota is affiliated with the American Federation of Teachers, National Education Association and AFL-CIO.

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