Schuyler Community Schools
ALL STAFF Zoom Meeting: April 17th Update
Friday, April 17, 2020 8:00 AM
Schuyler Community Schools Board Room
120 West 20th Street
Schuyler, NE 68661

I. Discussion Items

Prepared by: Christina Bywater, Secretary to the Board

Matthew L. Blomstedt, Ph.D., Commissioner

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April 16, 2020

To: Nebraska Public School Superintendents, Non-Public School Administrators, and ESU Administrators

CC: State Board of Education, Commissioner's Cabinet, and NDE Leadership

RE: Commissioner's Message Regarding Graduation Ceremony Guidance and Interpretation

There have been numerous requests to address and provide guidance on local graduation ceremonies and celebrations for the high school Class of 2020. Although both the Governor and I have spoken on this topic, and reiterated in the Governor's press conference today, there are many attempts to appropriately recognize graduating seniors. The Governor and I have advised that any in-person graduation ceremony or recognition be scheduled in late summer (July or August) and only with the approval of local health officials. Some schools with less than ten seniors have found ways to host ceremonies and comply with social distancing guidelines and Directed Health Measures. Those scenarios will not be possible for the majority of schools. However, several school districts have sought to create a virtual graduation or recognition that is permissible ***if*** it does not violate the requirements set forth in the Directed Health Measure Order 2020-010.

The current and statewide Directed Health Measure (DHM) Order 2020-010 addresses both "gatherings" and "school activities" and the following are excerpts from that DHM Order.

Gatherings

1. Gatherings are hereby prohibited;
   A gathering is defined as any event or convening that brings together more than ten (10) patrons, customers or other invitees, excluding staff, in a single room or single space at the same time, including but not limited to, pre-schools, daycare facility (including in-home facilities), gymnasium, fitness center, auditorium, stadium, arena, large event conference room, meeting hall, library, or any other confined indoor or outdoor space. This also includes weddings and funerals, as well as parades, fairs, festivals, concerts, auto racing and other indoor and outdoor events.

Related to Schools:

1. All schools; public, private and parochial: are hereby ordered to cease all in person instruction, and all extra-curricular activities except for: remote learning, child care services, meal distribution, distribution of educational materials and supplies, general building or physical plant operations and maintenance, and residential services may be continued as needed or necessary
2. Schools are defined as public, private, and parochial elementary and secondary schools

Six Rules:

The Governor has also emphasized six rules to keep Nebraska healthy:

1. Stay home. No non-essential errands and no social gatherings. Respect the ten-person limit.
2. Socially distance your work. Work from home or use the six-foot rule as much as possible in the workplace.
3. Shop alone and only shop once a week. Do not take family with you.
4. Help kids follow social distancing. Play at home. No group sports. And no playgrounds.
5. Help [senior citizens] stay at home by shopping for them. Do not visit long-term care facilities.
6. Exercise daily at home or with an appropriately socially-distanced activity.

Local Public Health Officials Consensus View:

Yesterday, I met with local public health officials from across the state to discuss the issue in some depth. Although I have recommended that school officials work with local public health officials, it has become clear that our officials are far too busy to address each and every creative idea presented. In turn, I asked that public health officials present a consensus view so I could better advise and guide school and community leaders. There were several concerns discussed that included breaking the spirit of the DHM by creating quasi-public events that may provide a false sense of security about public health and undermine the spirit of the Directed Health Measures and the Six Rules to Keep Nebraska Healthy in this moment.

Commissioner's Interpretation and Guidance for Graduation for the Class of 2020:

As such I make the following recommendation to school officials that is supported by Nebraska's public health officials:

- The limits on gatherings apply to all types of graduation ceremonies.
- Graduation ceremonies are interpreted to be "extra-curricular activities" per the DHM and are ordered to cease.
- Graduation recognitions are recommended to be done remotely by virtual means and avoid convening small groups or other efforts that attempt to undermine the intent of the order.

- All in person graduation ceremonies and celebrations must meet the statewide Directed Health Measure Order 2020-010 or should be postponed until such a time that the statewide order is lifted and that subsequent orders would clearly permit such gatherings.
- Efforts to dismiss or subvert the Directed Health Measure may be considered a violation of school accreditation or approval rules related to health and safety and may be considered a violation of the ethical standards for certificated school officials.

Although I join you in the critical need to recognize students and families who have much to celebrate, I also ask you to join me in celebrating in fashions and in times that better allow Nebraskans to Stay Home and Keep Healthy.

Matthew L. Blomstedt, Ph.D.

Commissioner of Education

If they cancel the rest of the school year, students would miss 2.5 months of education. Many people are concerned about students falling behind because of this. Yes, they may fall behind when it comes to classroom education...

But what if...
What if instead of falling “behind", this group of kids are ADVANCED because of this? Hear me out.
What if they have more empathy, they enjoy family connection, they can be more creative and entertain themselves, they love to read, they love to express themselves in writing.
What if they enjoy the simple things, like their own backyard and sitting near a window in the quiet.
What if they notice the birds and the dates the different flowers emerge, and the calming renewal of a gentle rain shower?
What if this generation are the ones to learn to cook, organize their space, do their laundry, and keep a well run home?
What if they learn to stretch a dollar and to live with less?
What if they learn to plan shopping trips and meals at home.
What if they learn the value of eating together as a family and finding the good to share in the small delights of the everyday?
What if they are the ones to place great value on our teachers and educational professionals, librarians, public servants and the previously invisible essential support workers like truck drivers, grocers, cashiers, custodians, logistics, and health care workers and their supporting staff, just to name a few of the millions taking care of us right now while we are sheltered in place?
What if among these children, a great leader emerges who had the benefit of a slower pace and a simpler life to truly learn what really matters in this life?

What if they are AHEAD?