

April, 3, 2020

Dear RSU 16 employees,

Governor Mills announced that all schools will be closed until May 1, 2020, which means we will not be able to return students to school sooner than May 4, 2020. The Governor also issued a stay at home order. This stay at home order applies to most RSU 16 employees, but some critical positions are still exempt like; food services, drivers, custodial and some secretarial support staff. The Department of Education sent a priority notice with guidance regarding the Governor's executive orders and school personnel. Please take the time to read the entire priority notice at the end of this letter.

Hourly Employee Update

A positive fact about this unprecedented time is that no RSU 16 employees, in a paid status, suffered a financial loss (pay, benefits or job) during this school closure. The fundamental understanding for your full pay and benefits is that you are still available (on call) to work remotely from home, if possible, or in person when your job cannot be done remotely (drivers, food services, custodians and some secretarial support staff).

Through the heroic actions of our caring and unselfish drivers and food service personnel the RSU has fed and continues to feed our students. Because the school closure has lasted longer than initially expected, we will be asking food service and drivers who are physically able and who have yet to assist with the feeding of our students to start exchanging with those who have been working so hard over the last three weeks. If you are not physically able to work, are sick, or are caring for someone who is sick you will need to provide documentation from your doctor so you can access your earned sick leave.

We will be having April vacation from April 21-24, 2020 as scheduled, therefore education technicians, drivers and food services employees are expected to take a break as they normally would during April vacation. This means, as usual, that these hourly employees will not be paid during these four days. So plan accordingly as you normally would.

All Employee Update

As we complete our third week of isolation from our work spaces and students the strain is visible in all corners of our community. Today is an opportunity to remind everyone not to let your guard down just because most of us are in our relative safety of our homes. The CDC has warned us the worst is yet to come in the coming weeks, so I remind you not to accidentally or recklessly contribute to the continued spread of this virus. Be responsible and refrain from large gatherings, parties and visiting other staff and/or students until this crisis is over.

Finally, consider giving blood to keep a stable supply during this pandemic. As the Red Cross website states, "There is no known end date in this fight against coronavirus and the Red Cross needs the help of blood and platelet donors and blood drive hosts to maintain a sufficient blood supply for weeks to come. In times of crisis, the Red Cross is fortunate to witness the best of humanity as people roll up a sleeve to help those in need."

We are so proud of all the ingenuity and determination that all of you have shown in the wake of this crisis. Please continue your outreach to all students during this unique educational opportunity. We still need to look after each other and our families. Ask your administrators for help, guidance, and direction as needed. It seems that everything right now changes by the minute, so I'm sure there will be many more changes ahead, so please stay patient, check our website routinely, and we will continue to update each of you as necessary.

Sincerely,

Ken Healey and Amy Hediger

PRIORITY NOTICE: Unified Guidance Regarding Executive Orders and School Personnel: All School Services and Employees are Essential

As our state and nation face unprecedented challenges due to the COVID-19 state of emergency, it is more critical than ever that Maine schools and school employees work together to provide the deeply needed services of continuity of education, communications, connectivity, payroll, other administrative activities, custodial services, transportation/deliveries, and student nutrition. The Governor has directed SAUs to pay hourly employees for their previously contracted hours throughout the remainder of this school year, and this decision was predicated on the understanding that all school employees would continue to have important roles in limited, alternative, ongoing operations. The Department of Education has also stated that all school employees are essential. The Priority Notice from the Dept of Education on 3/27/20 says: "All school employees are considered to be 'essential' under the Governor's Executive Order #19 and should be expected to complete all duties and tasks assigned to them."

On March 31st, Governor Mills instituted Executive Order 28 further restricting public contact and movement, schools, vehicle travel and retail business operations. In addition, cities and towns are also putting new provisions in place, which restrict operations of non-essential businesses, new questions have arisen about the definition and what it means for public-school employees to be essential.

Although school employees are essential, their physical presence at school is not always necessary during this emergency, as there are many tasks and trainings that could be completed remotely. In light of the Governor's "Stay Healthy At Home" order at this critical juncture to flatten the curve, physical presence in schools should be restricted to a bare minimum in order to provide essential functions – such as providing educational and nutritional services to students, payroll, certain cleaning and maintenance staff, certain administrative assistant staff where communications cannot occur remotely, IT staff to support remote learning functions, transportation staff – and only as long as social distancing and other CDC recommendations (including hand washing protocols) are being implemented. The fewest numbers of employees possible should be on premises, and only during the necessary time frame required for conducting such services. All functions that do not require in-person staff in schools should be done remotely.

It is possible that some hourly staff members will not have enough immediately purposeful work to do (either on site or remotely) to fill the contracted hours for which they are paid. In that case, these employees should be considered to be "on standby", ready to assist as work does become available for them. Administrators and supervisors should determine when/if certain positions are needed to perform tasks. While on standby, employees will continue to receive hourly wages as contracted prior to the COVID emergency.

Given the Governor's most recent Executive Order, the Department of Education (DOE), Maine School Board Association/Maine School Superintendents Association (MSBA/MSSA), Maine Principals Association (MPA), Maine Education Association (MEA), Maine Administrators of Services for Children with Disabilities (MADSEC) and Maine Curriculum Leaders Association (MCLA), would like to clarify the roles and responsibilities of public-school employees during this time.

- Employees who are able and assigned by supervisors to work remotely should continue to do so, and raise any concerns they may have with their local district leadership. Administrators and staff are encouraged to collaborate and problem-solve to foster telework options during this crisis.
- School employees should continue to go to work if they must be there to perform essential functions. CDC guidelines should be strictly followed including social distancing of at least 6 feet from all other people. School employees working onsite should be kept to the bare minimum necessary to execute the functions that require their physical presence.
- Employees whose services are not immediately needed, as determined by supervisors, or whose work cannot be done remotely, should continue to receive their regular wages and should remain ready to perform tasks as they become necessary and assigned by supervisors. Employees on standby leave should be ready to help schools meet their basic needs, and may be assigned to participate in a rotation of duties during this time.

· Any school employees who are sick, in a high risk group, or feel unsafe for any reason, should have access to their own sick leave, the new federal leave program, a district sick leave bank, if applicable, or any other paid leave that a district may be providing.

We can all take common sense steps to ensure that only staff whose physical presence is required to provide services and who are engaged in immediately necessary services are in our schools, and that those who are in our schools are being protected by following the most current CDC guidelines for social distancing, cleaning, hand washing, and ventilation.

We so appreciate all the work being done to help students during these challenging times. We know our public schools are wonderful places filled with amazing, hard-working and dedicated staff. Please be sure to take care of each other during this crisis.