



# STATE BOARD of ELEMENTARY and SECONDARY EDUCATION

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April 9, 2020

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3<sup>rd</sup> BESE District

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Superintendent

The Honorable John Bel Edwards  
Governor, State of Louisiana  
Office of the Governor  
900 North Third St.  
Baton Rouge, LA 70804-9004

## **RE: Support of Extending Closures for School Facilities for the Remainder of Academic Year 2019-2020**

Governor Edwards:

Proclamation JBE 2020-27, issued on the afternoon of Friday, March 13, 2020, closed all Louisiana K-12 public school facilities to comply with guidance relative to social distancing in order to limit the transmission of the COVID-19 virus; this was necessary to protect the health and wellness of students, staff, and their respective families. With the ensuing escalation of COVID-19 cases, this closure was extended through April 30, 2020. We, the leadership of the Louisiana Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE), respectfully request that you act now in making a decision to formally extend school facilities closures for the remainder of the Spring term.

The Center for Disease Control (CDC) recently issued guidance to this effect, noting the closure of school facilities greatly reduces the spread of COVID-19; additionally, and unfortunately, recently reported data suggests that much of our population in Louisiana is particularly vulnerable and susceptible to this virus—as confirmed cases continue to rise. The CDC factors for long-term facilities closure, based on available science, indicates that the citizens of our state are more at risk if children and staff are introduced into these facilities too soon.

Local districts around the state have pivoted quickly to provide ‘continuity of education’ to all students. It should be noted that Local Education Agency (LEA) Distance Education Plans were never meant to be a solution to such an unprecedented situation; however, more than half our school systems have moved to online learning to some extent, while nearly all have implemented some level of distance learning (online, paper, or some combination) for students. BESE leadership recognizes this situation will have a significant impact on learning, despite these valiant efforts, and will continue to support the Louisiana Department of Education (LDE) in discerning more comprehensive support for LEAs to develop district learning plans, reflective of the current learning situation, as well as continue to provide effective learning experiences for all students.

During this crisis, we also recognize the issues for so many of our students around food fragility and the exaggeration of this issue; for this reason, BESE leadership continues to support innovative efforts on the part of school systems to provide two free meals per day to children age 18 and younger, regardless of where the child is enrolled in school, during the closure period.

Both LDOE and BESE leadership will act quickly and decisively, along with your administration, to make necessary decisions to facilitate extended facilities closures if that were to become necessary. Upon the directive to extend closures, LDE can and will immediately focus attention on a long-term plan to address loss of instructional time, as well as a long-term plan for distance learning. With the input from many stakeholders, there is much work to be done—we are ready to focus on solutions for the children of Louisiana and appreciate your leadership during this time.

Sincerely,



Sandy Holloway  
BESE President



Tony Davis  
BESE Vice President  
District 4 BESE member



Kira Orange Jones  
BESE Secretary-Treasurer  
District 2 BESE member