# COVID-19 Continued School Closures

#  April 15, 2020

The Honorable Kim Reynolds,

Governor, State of Iowa

Dr. Ann Lebo, Director, Department of Education

CC: Linda Fandel

Dear Governor Reynolds, Lt. Governor Gregg, and Director Lebo,

Thank you and thanks to your staffs for the amazing work done over the last month to give school districts resources and flexibility to serve our students and families during this extraordinary time!

As rural school leaders, we are contemplating the impact of challenges to reopening school. Whether we conclude this 2019-20 school year within our school buildings or virtually, we have these thoughts:

* **Internet Access Inequity:** Many of our rural students, families and school staff have no or very slow internet connection. They may not have enough devices. Bandwidth must be shared across the household. We look forward to the continued priority of connecting rural Iowa to the quality of internet access necessary for schools, business, agriculture, health care and rural quality of life.
* **Make-up Work and Grading:** The above inequity has led many of us to select the voluntary continuous learning option. We remain concerned about not being able to grade work that was assigned prior to the closure, mostly to help our graduating seniors and other high school students to proceed to the next level. Several of us were in the midst of flu absences right before the closure. We would appreciate the flexibility to locally manage make-up work so as not to disadvantage students. We will continue to strive to reach all.
* **Returning to Work with At-risk staff**: Most rural bus drivers, food service workers, custodians and many associates are older Iowans, some with health issues that make returning to work with even a small risk of COVID-19 infection ill-advised. We had shortages in these positions prior to the pandemic. Although we will try, scaling back up to a full scope of school services may be impossible.
* **Adequate Notice and Local Control:** thank you for planning on at least two-weeks’ notice for continued school closure status. We would also appreciate local control, even if the school closure statewide order expires, to determine that we do not have adequate capacity to reopen. If we commit to continuous learning, we would respectfully request waiver of making up additional days due to local closure decisions. Lastly, please investigate action to waive the school start date this August. Many of us would consider starting school a few weeks early to help close any learning gaps due to extended closure, but our school boards need adequate time to set the calendar and notify parents yet this Spring of any plans.

We look forward to working with you in creating the policies and conditions for our rural school students to thrive beyond the pandemic. Thank you for your work on behalf of all Iowans.

**RSAI Leadership Group;** Robert Olson, Clarion-Goldfield/Dows Superintendent; Dennis McClain, Adair Casey/Guthrie Center Superintendent; Duane Willhite, North Fayette Valley Superintendent; Paul Croghan, Nodaway Valley and CAM Superintendent; Laurie Noll, Fairfield Superintendent,

Nick Trenkamp, Central Superintendent and Dan Petersen, Central DeWitt Superintendent. RSAI Professional Advocate, Margaret Buckton, 515.201.3755 margaret@iowaschoolfinance.com