



Tennessee Education Association supports closure of schools, TNReady cancellation

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: Monday, March 16, 2020

NASHVILLE, Tenn. – The following statement may be attributed to Tennessee Education Association President Beth Brown.

“As concerns about the spread of COVID-19 rapidly increase statewide, we are relieved to see Gov. Bill Lee take decisive action to protect students, educators and families. The Tennessee Education Association supports the call for an immediate closure of our public schools statewide.

The Center for Disease Control and other federal agencies have issued guidance that gatherings of more than 50 people must be avoided to slow the spread of this dangerous virus. With that direction, it is irresponsible to keep our public schools open. If it is no longer safe for the General Assembly to conduct business with the public present, it is no longer safe for our schools to remain open.

It is critical that the state implement a plan to ensure students’ needs are met and educators are not harmed during a statewide closure. Many Tennessee students face food insecurity at home and rely on their school for a hot meal each day. Many students are also without computer or internet access at home, and thus unable to participate in distance learning. The Tennessee Department of Education must act quickly to address these concerns and work to identify a solution to protect our students.

The state’s plan must also include protections for educators during a statewide closure. No educator should be forced to use sick time or go unpaid while the state copes with a global pandemic, this especially includes education support professionals. Local school districts are the largest employer in many communities. A disruption in pay for educators would significantly increase the financial impact of the pandemic in Tennessee.

TEA is also concerned about the upcoming TNReady testing window. The Tennessee Department of Education’s recent letter to directors of schools indicated TNReady testing will continue as planned. Tennessee students and educators are dealing with increased stress and uncertainty following the devastating storms in Middle Tennessee and now a global health crisis. It is inappropriate to move forward with TNReady testing this year.

The Tennessee Education Association is calling on the Lee administration and the Tennessee General Assembly to cancel all TNReady testing and the portfolio evaluation system for this school year. There will be a significant loss of classroom time for students, and the continuity of instruction critical to building knowledge will be disrupted. Continuing with state high-stakes testing, or the time-consuming portfolio system used in Kindergarten and related arts, will only be setting our students and teachers up to fail.

The U.S. Department of Education has already released guidance stating it will consider waiving requirements for state-wide tests.

The Tennessee Department of Education and our state legislature must prioritize the health and well-being of students, educators and families. With that priority in mind the decision is simple to close all public schools, and cancel TNReady testing and the portfolio evaluation system. It would provide needed relief in this health crisis.

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