

Governor Scott Orders Orderly Closure of Vermont PreK-12 Schools This Week

Districts Tasked with Continuity of Education and Service Plans

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Contact: Brittney Wilson, Brittney.Wilson@Vermont.gov

MONTPELIER, Vt. – In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, Governor Phil Scott has announced a Continuity of Education Plan for the orderly dismissal of all schools, and cancellation of all school related activities, no later than Wednesday, March 18. This directive, which will be distributed to schools later today, will last through April 6 -- but may very well be extended for a longer period.

Governor Scott's directive will task local districts with three key components to support the State response:

- Food and special needs services for children;
- Collaborating with the state to provide childcare options for healthcare workers and others essential to the response; and
- Systems for ensuring maintenance of education during the initial dismissal; and a continuing education plan if schools are dismissed for an extended period.

No student is required to be in school Monday or Tuesday, if their parents or guardians would prefer to keep them home.

Education professionals should report to work as scheduled to assist in these efforts during this period of school dismissal. Districts are directed to follow workplace hygiene guidance issued by the Vermont Department of Health.

"This decision is based on the best scientific evidence available to the experts at the Vermont Department of Health," said Dr. Mark Levine. "Closing schools at the end of the day Tuesday is another important step to help keep us ahead of the curve, in terms of preventing and reducing spread of COVID-19."

"The orderly dismissal of schools is essential to support both the State's response to COVID-19 and the needs of children and families across Vermont," Governor Scott said. "We must ensure children are safe, nourished, and still learning even as the traditional structure of school is disrupted. The work of educators will be essential in this effort."

Governor Scott continued: "This is a moment of service for all of us. I know that educators across Vermont will do their part to support students and families. I've asked the Agency of Education to work with superintendents and local districts to ensure every child continues to receive the services they need from their schools, as well as assignments to take home to continue their academic studies."

Governor Scott said that, while he hoped schools would only need to be closed through April 6, it is possible they will be closed for a longer period and families and businesses should prepare for this possibility.

MORE ON CONTINUITY OF EDUCATION AND SERVICE PLANS

Governor Scott said, to prepare for the potential for an extended dismissal, each district must have a Continuity of Education Plan that includes:

- Meal service for those who need it;
- Services for children with disabilities and special needs;
- Working with the state to provide district-based options that meet the childcare needs of healthcare workers and other Vermonters essential to the response (EMS, Fire, LEO, National Guard personnel, etc.);
- Ensuring children have trackable work to do when schools are dismissed Tuesday; and
- Remote learning plan that prepares for schools to be closed for a longer period.

School districts that have Continuity of Education Plans in place that meet these directives may elect to close before Wednesday. All schools should be closed for instruction at the end of the school day on Tuesday.

Under the Governor’s directive, schools will remain operational for administrators, teachers and staff to sustain essential services and to plan and implement continuity of education through remote learning. The Vermont Department of Health has provided “social distancing” guidance that districts should use to ensure a healthy workplace.

Governor Scott also added that the State understands there will be many unique challenges around specific students or specific programs, and that every district is going to have a different localized approach.

“We need local government – and especially our schools and educators – to lend their capable hands and their enormous hearts in this effort. It is very important to the overall response.”

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MEDIA NOTE: Governor Scott and other state officials will host a media availability tomorrow (Monday, March 16th) to provide an update on overall response and answer questions. To encourage social distancing a call-in option will be available.