

Decorah Community School District
Closure Update
April 3, 2020



Good Afternoon,

On Thursday, April 2, 2020 Governor Kim Reynolds determined that it is in the public health interest of the state for Iowa schools to remain closed through Thursday, April 30, 2020. To help districts and nonpublic schools accommodate student and family needs as flexibly as possible, the Iowa Department of Education has provided guidance on school closures and continuous learning.

Decorah Community School District received this new guidance Friday, March 27, 2020, and in anticipation of the extension of the emergency closure, began work to develop a systemic approach to serving our students and families. Iowa school districts may consider three approaches to the emergency closure. School districts are required to report which option, or blend of options, have been selected by April 10, 2020. The three options are:

- Schools Closed and No Services Provided
- Voluntary Educational Enrichment Opportunities Provided
- Required Educational Services Provided
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We feel a responsibility to continue to support the learning and well-being of our students. Therefore, the district will only consider the second and third options.

Iowa Department of Education Definitions

Voluntary Educational Enrichment Opportunities- The educational enrichment approach to continuous learning includes those activities that are provided to students and families while the district is closed. This may include packets, teleconferencing, online instruction, or other outreach activities. Student participation is voluntary and no grading or credit is given.

Required Educational Services- Continuous learning through the provision of approved educational services ensures that academic work is equivalent in effort and rigor to typical classroom work. All students are required to participate, attendance is taken, work is graded, and credit granted. Typically, instruction is provided through some type of online learning. Hybrid models of learning, involving some online learning and other methodologies like packets, are also available. These services must be approved by the Iowa Department of Education.

Iowa school districts must indicate the service model selected by the end of business Friday, April 10, 2020. Additionally, if a district is going to provide Required Educational Services at any grade levels, the district must submit an application and receive approval from the Department of Education. Iowa school districts received access to the application this afternoon. We are reviewing the application, and will make a decision regarding providing Required Educational Services at any grade levels early next week.

Moving Forward

While we still have important decisions to make, there are several things we know now. We know this emergency closure will continue through Thursday, April 30. We know we need to build a service plan that will work in the event we don't ever return to our brick and mortar schools this school year. We also know, based on feedback from parents and students, that we need to make improvements in our service model, regardless what Iowa Department of Education definition we use.

By next Friday, when we have to inform the Department of Education which model we are using, we will be working to make two key improvements.

- Reduced variation across buildings and teachers.
- A streamlined point of entry for accessing information and learning opportunities

We have appreciated the feedback we have received from parents and students about what is working, and what isn't. We understand the confusion multiple forms of communication can cause when families have students in multiple grade levels. We also see that it can be hard to know what to expect when families receive almost daily communication from one building or teacher, and sporadic or inconsistent communication from another.

We are facing unprecedented times, and we have done our best to navigate them well. We are learning, and we will improve. I am incredibly grateful to our staff for their agility and dedication to students. We are grateful to our students, families and community for your partnership. We will use the new guidance from the state to make a decision about our service model. We will inform the state of our decision by next Friday, and we will continue to communicate with you along the way.

Thank you for your support of Decorah Schools.

Mark M. Lane Superintendent of Schools