

Area schools close as COVID-19 threatens

(MSC News)--Kansas' top education official has urged the state's public schools to remain closed this week to check the spread of the virus that causes COVID-19.

Education Commissioner Randy Watson announced in a tweet that he “strongly recommends” that schools close if they were not on spring break.

Governor Laura Kelly Sunday evening announced that the Kansas Department of Education is placing the school year on hold for one week. However, the decision to close will be made by local school districts. That happened during a news conference held by Kelly to reinforce Watson's recommendation.

“We take this pandemic and our preparedness seriously,” Kelly said. “One of these areas of particular concern is our K-12 schools, where our children, parents and staff come together in one place. Our schools form the cornerstones of our communities. It is because of this that we need to ensure that schools are prepared to face the COVID-19 challenge.

“When classes resume, parents can be assured their children will continue to receive the same high-quality, world-class education Kansas is known for,” Kelly said.

Local area schools have made the decision to keep their doors closed for the week, due to the virus threat.

Among the schools to remain closed through March 20 is Atchison’s USD 409, the Atchison County Schools of USD 377, Maur-Hill-Mount Academy, Saint Benedict Catholic School, and Trinity Lutheran.

Other schools have also canceled classes and activities through March 20, including South Brown County USD 430, Hiawatha USD 415, Doniphan West USD 111, Riverside USD 114, Troy USD 429, Jackson Heights USD 335, Holton USD 336, Royal Valley USD 337, Valley Heights USD 498, and Marysville USD 364.

Other area schools are going to remain closed longer, extending the classroom and activities break through March 29. That includes Valley Falls USD 338, Jefferson County North USD 339, Jefferson County West USD 340, Oskaloosa USD 341, McLouth USD 342 and Perry-Lecompton USD 343.

Meanwhile, the state health department on Sunday called for people who are traveling outside the U.S. or to several other states to quarantine themselves for

two weeks upon their return.

The state Department of Health and Environment recommended home quarantines for anyone who was traveling Sunday or later outside the U.S. or to California, New York or Washington state.

The Kansas State Board of Education has formed a team of experts, many of whom are former Teachers of the Year, to build a comprehensive plan to address the challenges that schools are facing in light of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Among the specific topics this team will address are:

- **How schools can move education online, if necessary, so students can progress toward the end of semester.**
- **How schools can assist students who do not have access to online tools to finish out the semester, especially those who are set to graduate in May.**
- **How schools can provide for at-risk students and those who have Individualized Education Plans (IEPs).**
- **How schools will ensure a continuity of school-based mental health services.**
- **How schools can assist in providing meals for students who need them.**
- **What role schools can play in assisting with childcare for essential local and state healthcare workers, first responders and other essential workers who live in their counties.**
- **How schools will assist in efforts to keep children from congregating in community spaces and keep them quarantined in their own homes.**
- **And educating parents on ways they can help the continuity of education for their children.**

For the most up-to-date information and resources regarding the status of COVID-19 in Kansas, please visit the Kansas Department of Health and Environment website: kdheks.gov

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