



NEW JERSEY SENATE

SENATE CHAMBERS

P.O. Box 099

TRENTON, NEW JERSEY 08625-0099

February 28, 2020

Dr. Lamont Repollet
Commissioner
New Jersey Department of Education
PO Box 500,
Trenton, NJ 08625-0500

Dear Commissioner Repollet,

I write to you on behalf of the Senate Republican caucus. We are watching with concern as the novel coronavirus continues its spread from China where it appears to have originated around the end of 2019. In recent weeks, the virus has been detected in nearly 60 countries, including the United States.

We are grateful for the diligent efforts of state and national health officials to prevent the transmission of the virus within our country and thankful that no cases have been reported yet in New Jersey.

Further, we appreciate your proactive outreach in a letter dated February 3 to school administrators which offered valuable information on State health resources, including the coronavirus hotline.

Unfortunately, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has warned in recent days that eventual "community spread" of the coronavirus within the United States is likely and that "disruption to everyday life may be severe."

Given that heightened level of concern since your letter was sent more than three weeks ago, we believe it would be prudent to begin making and sharing plans for any resulting disruptions in New Jersey, including to our schools.

Many of our district offices have already been contacted by parents and school administrators who have questions about how they could or should respond to a local or statewide coronavirus outbreak. Specifically, they have questions about procedures for preemptive and responsive school closures should the virus begin spreading in New Jersey.

In the event of closures, which have the potential to last significantly longer than those caused by snowstorms or hurricanes, they have asked if the NJDOE has any contingency plans that would allow for the emergency suspension or reduction of the requirement that

school districts must be in session for 180 days from July 1st through June 30th. Those concerns seem warranted in light of lengthy school closures in other jurisdictions internationally that have been impacted by the coronavirus.

In some of those places, schooling has continued from home through online tools. Many of our districts have some e-learning capabilities that have been utilized during closures due to weather. Has there been any discussion or determination of our ability to substitute distance learning for in-school education to a greater extent should coronavirus-related closures be necessary?

I know that many people across New Jersey are asking these and other questions as they seek to keep children safe while continuing to pursue their mission of providing a thorough education regardless of the challenges that confront us. We look forward to your response, preferably in a broader communication to parents, the public, and school administrators.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Tom H. Kean", with a long horizontal stroke above it.

Tom Kean
Senate Republican Leader