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Governor orders more in-person learning this school year

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Perhaps the most interesting thing that happened this past week was Governor Jay Inslee's announcement Friday, March 12, that through an emergency proclamation to be issued this coming week, all schools in Washington must offer the opportunity for in-person learning to students who choose that option. The announcement came with direction that all Department of Health and other safety protocols (including the six-foot distance between students) also must be maintained, and that the order did not mean all students would be returned to buildings 100% of the time.

Here's an outline of that announcement from Maddy Thompson, the senior policy advisor to Governor Inslee:

Today the Governor announced that he is issuing an Emergency Proclamation early next week that prohibits all school districts from failing to offer all K-12 students the opportunity to engage in both remote/on-line instruction and on-campus/in-person instruction.

Key points:

- *The Emergency Proclamation is based on a children's mental health emergency: While WA has had high rates of youth mental and behavioral health problems in the past, there is evidence that lack of connection to peers, mentors and educators during the pandemic have led to feelings of disconnection and isolation and unprecedented increases in mental and behavioral health issues. Hospitals and pediatricians have provided data that show these problems have significantly worsened this school year.*
- *The Emergency Proclamation requires districts to offer an in-person option as well as a remote option in all grades by April 19.*

Please watch the [full press conference](#) for additional details, with remarks from: Superintendent Reykdal (OSPI); Dr. Nwando Anyaoku, (director of pediatrics and chief health equity officer, Swedish, Seattle); Dr. Peter Asante (chair of pediatrics, Virginia Mason Memorial Hospital, Yakima); and Lacy Fehrenbach (deputy secretary for COVID response, Department of Health (for Q&A.))

Further details:

- *Districts are required to phase-in in-person learning by the following dates:*
 - *By April 5, all students in grades K–6 (that have not already been) must be provided with an opportunity to engage in in-person learning.*
 - *By April 19, all students in grades K–12 (that have not already been) must be provided with an opportunity to engage in in-person learning.*
- *This school year, higher proportions of students are also disengaging from their learning, with large increases in absences and in the percentage of students receiving no credit for their courses.*

- Schools will still be required to follow **all mandatory health and safety requirements** by the Department of Health and the Department of Labor & Industries.
- By April 19, at least 30% of each student’s average weekly instructional hours must be provided in-person (unless the student and their family chooses to learn fully remotely). Each student must have an opportunity to learn in-person at least two days per week. These may be partial or full days.
- All school districts must continue to work to exceed the 30% minimum in-person instructional hours, and they must reach the maximum capacity and frequency of in-person learning they can provide – following all health and safety requirements – as soon as possible.
- In-person instruction must comply with DOH school health and safety requirements as well as LNI requirements for employee safety as directed by the School Employer Health and Safety Requirements.

Additional information:

- Resources to support students and families needing mental and behavioral supports can be found at this website.
- With the passage of the American Rescue Plan Act, schools in our state will have received \$2.6 billion in federal pandemic relief. The Governor supports ongoing state and local investments in additional supports to students as these needs are likely to continue into the long-term.
- In addition, he supports additional investments in expanding behavioral health supports and the behavioral health workforce and there is much, much more work to do related to mental and behavioral health. This emergency proclamation will also direct the Department of Health and the state Health Care Authority to immediately begin work on recommendations that would detail how to support the behavioral health needs of our children and youth over the next 12 months. This will help us address and triage the full spectrum of rising pediatric behavioral health needs. The Governor acknowledged the long-term inequities and racial biases in the educational system and expressed a need to create policies supported by investments to address these issues.
- Schools in WA have proven they can open safely with health and safety protocols in place. Vaccinations will provide an added layer of security. Thousands more educators are getting vaccinated in WA each day and have exclusive access to vaccinations through the federal pharmacies following President Biden’s direction to prioritize educators, school staff and childcare workers.
- The Governor noted that **the 6 ft rule for space between students in the classroom that is currently required as part of the school health and safety measures will not change in the short term**, but it is being reviewed as more data and information comes in and organizations such as the AAP and WHO are recommending 3 ft.

March 9 cutoff, work resumes in committees

Lawmakers wrapped up work on March 9, the final day for each chamber to act on bills which started in that chamber. Even under these virtual conditions, more than 250 bills passed out of each chamber for consideration in the other body. Committees responded quickly, scheduling bills for public hearings and executive sessions Wednesday through Friday, and have a full load scheduled for next week.

In addition to committee work, the March revenue forecast will be issued at 8:00 AM. on Wednesday, March 17. Budget writers are hoping for a pot of gold in the forecast; a March 3 economic report showed that revenue collections were up by nearly \$600 million between November 2020 and February 2021. Couple that with the infusion of the federal stimulus funds under the American Rescue Plan Act and last week's announcement from Governor Inslee moving counties into Phase 3 reopening, and the leprechauns will likely be leaping for joy.

Transportation fix, enrollment stabilization bills still alive

Per last week's report, [E2SSB 5128](#) was substantially modified as it passed the Senate floor on March 4. Among the problems is the loss of the ability for school districts to use the last year of full ridership for the 2021-22 school year. Lawmakers have made assurances this was unintentional and would be fixed in either a policy bill or in the budget. The bill is scheduled for a public hearing on Tuesday, March 16 at 8:00 AM.

Last Monday the House passed ESHB 1476, 90-7, after accepting an [amendment](#) to require school districts to be open for in-person instruction to all students, defined as at least 40 hours of in-person instruction per month while following state health guidelines, by the beginning of the 2021-22 school year in order to collect additional enrichment levies. The bill has been referred to the Senate Ways & Means Committee but has not been scheduled for a public hearing. Lawmakers are saying they think the enrollment stabilization could be handled in the 2021-23 operating budget.

School district apportionment has been reduced in line with enrollment decline and fewer students riding buses/buses being used for other purposes. With a third round of federal stimulus funds looming, some districts may have a difficult time explaining why the state should keep them whole this school year. An important distinction will be to show the federal funds compared to the lost state funding for transportation and enrollment.

District by district estimates of ESSER III funds, including a combined total of all ESSER funds, have been posted to the OSPI website at the following link:

<https://www.k12.wa.us/sites/default/files/public/communications/ESSERComparison.xlsx>

WSPTA Legislative Priorities

(all bills may be accessed [here](#))

Washington State PTA adopts a [two-year platform](#). Delegates at the 2020 Legislative Assembly adopted five issues as the highest priority issues, and three as "Also Supported." [Videos](#) and handouts for members' use in advocacy efforts this session are posted on the WSPTA Advocacy [page](#) under each position statement.

The following bills failed to meet the March 9 deadline and are likely dead for the session (click [here](#) and type in the bill number for more information):

- 2SHB 1263 would have created a new rural infrastructure program at the Department of Commerce and would have included school districts as eligible applicants.
- 2SHB 1354 would have created a work group to analyze youth suicide, including access to lethal means.
- SHB 1366 would have required school districts to prioritize the start of in-person learning to certain students following an emergency.
- SSB 5078 would have limited high-capacity magazines to 17 rounds or less, along with other restrictions.
- 2SSB 5147 would have created several new grant programs to address summer enrichment and learning loss, as well as funded additional instructional days, removed a cap on Running Start students, encouraged community-based partnerships, expanded dual language programs, and created a four-year pilot program for up to 20 school districts to conduct a “balanced school calendar.” While the bill didn’t pass, all or any of the elements of the bill can be done in the 2021-23 operating budget.
- SB 5161 would have required all school districts to incorporate curricula about the history, culture, and government of the nearest federally recognized Indian tribe or tribes into social studies curricula by September 1, 2023.

The Week Ahead

See the Week 10 events and bill tracker.

Advocacy in Action

With the start of public hearings again last week, Washington State PTA parent advocates testified on the following issues:

- Natalya Yudkovsky asked the Senate education committee to pass [SHB 1302](#) from committee. The bill would extend the opportunity for 9th graders to earn college credit when taking College in the High School courses. Also, at the request of WSPTA, bill sponsor Rep. April Berg, D-Everett, added stronger provisions to clarify the cost of courses, the option to take the course but not for college credit, and course expectations. Hear Natalya’s testimony [here](#).
- Speaking in favor of [2SSB 5327](#), establishing a confidential youth tip line, Tanya Aggar shared some heartbreaking stories about youth suicides from the past week with the House Children, Youth and Families Committee. “Youth suicide is preventable, and the goal is zero. No more deaths,” said Aggar. Her testimony can be found [here](#).
- Last fall, members adopted a position to close the digital divide, improve affordable connectivity, and provide developmentally appropriate devices to students. Nancy Chamberlain shared the overall goal with the Senate Environment, Energy & Technology Committee [here](#), while Tori Emerson shared a more localized story with committee members, heard [here](#). The bill they were testifying on is [ESHB 1336](#), a bill that would authorize retail sales authority for broadband to PUDs and ports.

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- Vancouver parent Heather Lindberg [testified in support](#) of [SHB 1208](#), LAP funding flexibility, before the Senate Early Learning & K-12 Education Committee on March 12th. Lindberg asked the committee to pass the bill and move it quickly to the Governor’s desk to create predictability and stability for school districts that are starting budget preparations for the 2021-22 school year. A detailed explanation of the bill was offered by sponsor and House Education Committee Chair Sharon Tomiko Santos [here](#).
 - Marie Sullivan was a last-minute sign up, providing [public comment](#) on the State Board of Education [emergency rules](#) at their regular meeting March 10. The draft rules would create credit and pathway waiver options under specific circumstances during times of local, regional, state or national emergencies.