



March 23, 2020

Dear Dr. Salmon and Brigadier General Sumpter,

maryland  
state education  
association

140 Main Street  
Annapolis, MD 21401-2003  
t 800 448 6782  
f 410 263 3605  
marylandeducators.org

CHERYL BOST  
President

DOUG PROUTY  
Vice President

JOSEPH COUGHLIN  
Treasurer

DAVID E. HELFMAN  
Executive Director

We have all been thrust into uncharted territory and everyone is doing their best to respond in a timely manner to a crisis that is changing minute-by-minute. I commend you on making the swift decision to close schools for two weeks to try to get ahead of the spread of COVID-19 and allow time for planning for longer closures. It's commendable that all school systems were immediately able to get food distribution sites up and running, as the wellbeing of our students is at the forefront of our concerns. We have worked to help get the word out so families can take advantage of the student meal program. It's also been gratifying to learn that most local superintendents are working collaboratively with their exclusive bargaining unit leaders when making decisions that affect staff.

I'm reaching out to you more formally than my prior email to Dr. Salmon sent last week in order to ask that we—MSEA, MSDE, and the State Board—work collaboratively to navigate the challenges that will be presented by an impending prolonged school closure. MSEA has the means to get information out quickly to educators across Maryland. In fact, we are in daily contact with each local association addressing questions and concerns that arise. Through such collaboration, we hope to improve not only the accuracy of information but also expand it to school staff, generally. We hope that can begin immediately.

As you determine the need for extended school closures, there are numerous decisions that need to be made for students as they progress in their schooling and for those graduating. Educators are trying their best to help students and families; but at this point, they have many questions concerning students and themselves as professionals. We are compiling those inquiries and listed frequent unresolved questions so far below. Since several relate to certification, I will also send to Sarah Sprouse and PSTEB Chair Chris Lloyd. Hopefully, we can work collaboratively to address these educator inquiries as well as any others that arise.

1. Maintaining or earning a Maryland certificate: Educators on various levels of the certification continuum, especially those with conditional certification, are concerned about the shutdown of colleges and universities as well as the suspension of school system courses. They are missing valuable time to complete

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the necessary requirements to stay on track to successfully meet needed requirements to either renew or qualify for an additional conditional certificate, in some instances. We recommend the state extend all certification requirement deadlines by one year, which is like actions taken by other states. We ask that a decision be made soon and communicated to educators and school system officials to help relieve undue stress and anxiety and to allow educators to plan and budget appropriately.

2. Tenure and Non-renewal: Teachers and other educators who will be brought up for non-renewal this spring in many districts have neither been notified nor provided an opportunity to engage in a dialogue regarding the appropriateness of non-renewal or continuation, particularly those in their first or second year of teaching. What will be the process and timeline for non-renewals of non-tenured teachers? We have similar concerns for tenured teachers and other educators who may be recommended for dismissal on the basis of incompetency without receiving the full support guaranteed through the evaluation processes. Even if there is a return to school this year, is there any consideration to suspending the evaluation process, specifically the student growth component, for the remainder of this school year?
3. Incoming teacher eligibility: Many colleges and universities have shut down classes and senior education majors will not have the opportunity to complete needed course requirements, internships, or obtain necessary support to perform well on required assessments. We've seen other states waive some of these requirements for the first year of employment and allow districts to still hire these new teachers. Will MSDE waive current requirements for incoming teachers? How will this information be communicated to colleges and universities, certification applicants, and local school systems and bargaining representatives?

Thank you in advance for your consideration and responses to these questions, the first of many we anticipate that will need to be determined. I'd be happy to speak with you over the phone or meet with you (virtually, of course!) to discuss these further. I'm eager to share answers with our members so that they may understand how to proceed and what is expected of them over the coming months.

Sincerely,  
Cheryl Bost  
MSEA President