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MEMORANDUM

Leadership, Service, and Support for School Boards

TO: The Honorable John Bel Edwards
Governor, State of Louisiana

FROM: Dr. Janet Pope, LSBA Executive Director
Mr. George Nassar, LSBA President

DATE: April 9, 2020

RE: Support of Extending Closing School Facilities for the 2019-2020 School Year

On behalf the LA School Boards Association, we thank you for the leadership that you have shown throughout the coronavirus pandemic. This has been a challenging time for all of us to say the least, yet school systems across the state have risen to the challenge of providing distance learning and caring for the nutritional needs of our most vulnerable students. The decision you made to close schools under the Stay at Home order was difficult, but the data shows that it was indeed the right decision. We are flattening the curve and the Louisiana School Boards Association is now urging you to make a decision that will facilitate the ending of the 2019-2020 school year at this time.

Our recommendation is based upon a holistic evaluation of what is in the best interests of Louisiana children and families and a consideration of what national experts are advising. Having students attempt to return to school this school year amid the COVID-19 pandemic will run counter to your stay-at-home order and social distancing mandates. Though early, it appears as though your mandates are beginning to flatten the curve in Louisiana and a premature return to school, before the 2020-2021 school year is scheduled to begin, could eliminate the gains we as a State have made. Dr. Anthony Fauci, of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, recently recommended publicly that schools not look to return to in-person classes until the Fall. As of the writing of this recommendation, 15 other states have made the decision to end the 2019-2020 school year, taking into consideration the same safety concerns.

The LSBA recognizes several reasons against an early return to school before the anticipated beginning of the 2020-2021 school year. As part of a school board members role and responsibility, locally elected public school board members shall serve in a policymaking capacity that is in the best interests of all students enrolled in schools under the board's jurisdiction. Throughout a school year, school board members work with their superintendent and staff to establish board policies that prioritize student achievement and financial efficiency. School boards plan in advance, using their policy making and budget authority to do what is in the best interest of students, teachers and support staff. Their health and safety are their number one priority throughout these unprecedented times.

First, before schools can be ready to receive students, there is the practical concern of having buildings and facilities thoroughly and properly disinfected. The cleaning process will take time, and there is no reasonable ability to complete the necessary cleaning in time to return to school before mid-May.

DR. JANET POPE
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR