



## Office of Public Instruction News

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### FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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#### **OPI Hosts Call with District Superintendents to Provide Coronavirus Updates**

HELENA—The Office of Public Instruction hosted a conference call with Montana's district superintendents this morning to provide updates and answer questions related to the coronavirus (COVID-19). The OPI and DPHHS sent guidance to schools on February 28<sup>th</sup> and again on March 12<sup>th</sup> which can be found on the state's [newsroom website](#).

“Local school leaders are on the front lines of keeping their students safe while also ensuring that they receive education services,” **Superintendent of Public Instruction Elsie Arntzen said Friday**. “I commend local leaders for their tremendous responses to the rapidly changing and unique circumstances they are facing. The OPI is here to serve and partner with local communities as they respond to the COVID-19 outbreak and we will work to ensure that they continue to receive funding and support as decisions are made at either the state or local level to close schools.”

In addition to OPI specialists and district superintendents, the Montana Federation of Public Employees, School Administrators of Montana, and the Montana Quality Education Coalition were on the call to answer questions. Discussions focused on procedures for school closures in Montana, continuing education services in response to a closure, school nutrition, and funding.

The Governor created a coronavirus task force last week which the OPI serves on and he declared a [state of emergency](#) in Montana yesterday. In addition, public health and emergency management professionals are working around the clock in Montana. On the call, the OPI discussed procedures for school closures noting that schools can be closed by local trustees, local and state health officials, or the Governor.

The Governor's emergency declaration yesterday does not direct school closures at this time but OPI staff are in communication with the Governor's Office as the situation evolves. The OPI has also submitted a waiver request to the USDA to allow school nutrition flexibility so that children can still receive meals.

The OPI has participated in calls with the U.S. Department of Education and will seek waivers and extensions to federal requirements for local districts as necessary. The OPI encouraged district leaders to stay in touch with their local health department regarding closures and also to stay in touch with the OPI as school closures are considered. Schools should also have plans in place to offer education services in the event of a school closure.

At this time, Montana does not have any confirmed cases of COVID-19 so now is the time for local communities and state leaders to prepare. All decisions should be based on the best available data from local, [state](#), and [federal](#) health authorities. District and community leaders are also encouraged to work with their neighboring communities in planning.

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