



IOWA

Department of Education

Ann Lebo, Director

Kim Reynolds, Governor
Adam Gregg, Lt. Governor

VIA ELECTRONIC MAIL ONLY

December 30, 2020

Thomas Ahart, Ed.D.
Superintendent
Des Moines Independent Community School District

Dear Dr. Ahart:

Thank you for your request for permission to provide primarily remote or continuous learning for the Des Moines Independent Community School District, dated December 28, 2020, for a period of January 4 through January 8, 2021.

Governor Reynolds's proclamation of disaster emergency, implementing the provisions of Senate File 2310 and most recently renewed on December 9, 2020, allows the Iowa Department of Education ("Department") to approve instruction through primarily remote learning, "in consultation with the Iowa Department of Public Health," based on "public health conditions in the building or district." The guidance on selecting the appropriate Return-to-Learn model released July 30, 2020, was established in consultation with the Iowa Department of Public Health. We have reviewed the information you presented in your application in light of this guidance.

After consultation with the Iowa Department of Public Health and considering the facts as a whole, the Department DENIES your request to provide primarily remote learning. As of today, the fourteen-day positivity rate for Polk County is 11.5 percent, well below the guideline rate of fifteen percent. Concerning student absences, you report: "Student absences prior to our current waiver were over 15% for students participating in the hybrid model for in-person instruction." Although this is above the guidance amount of ten percent, the Department gives this reported absenteeism less weight because it is from more than six weeks ago, when your students were last participating in in-person instruction. While this absenteeism certainly had weight in considering whether to grant your request for primarily remote learning on November 23, it is less relevant as time passes. The Department knows of no information that would suggest this absenteeism data is reflective of current public health conditions in the District.

We have also taken into consideration the other factors you have suggested in your letter – the general public health statistics, the recommendations from other agencies and organizations, and your apparent assertion that this waiver is necessary for equity

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and social justice. You have presented similar information to the Department in the past. But we are mindful of recent research showing that students engaged in remote learning are falling behind academically and that schools are not primary drivers of spread of the virus. And the Department weighed equity concerns – including the greater educational and social difficulties posed by remote learning to students with disabilities, low-income students, and English Learners – when establishing its guidelines in consultation with the Department of Public Health.

For all these reasons, the Department concludes that it is inappropriate to grant your request to provide primarily remote learning from January 4 through January 8, 2021.

Please let me know if I can answer any additional questions or if I can provide assistance as you proceed with your future plans.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "A. Lebo". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Dr. Ann Lebo
Director