

November 18, 2020

Dear NSSEO Families:

Last week we shared the difficult decision to move into an “Adaptive Pause” on in-person learning across NSSEO programs. That decision was made based on a combination of factors including internal and external metrics that our cooperative and other districts use for decision making. As a follow up to a weekly meeting with the Cook County Department of Public Health, we received correspondence that provided a strong recommendation that districts consider remote learning based on the sustained community transmission. On Friday, November 13, the CCDPH issued a Stay at Home advisory. While it is not a mandate, it is a strong recommendation based upon current public health guidance. This Stay at Home advisory went into effect Monday, November 16, and will last at least 30 days. In addition, Governor Pritzker made the announcement Tuesday, November 17th that Illinois is implementing Tier 3 Resurgence Mitigations reflected in the Restore Illinois Plan. Due to the statewide rise in cases, the Governor has issued more significant changes that encourage Illinoisans to stay home as much as possible. State leaders advise schools to follow the guidance of local departments of public health and the regional and local trends of COVID positivity rates in conjunction with internal considerations. Several of our NSSEO member districts and other neighboring school districts have also extended their Adaptive Pause plans very recently or are currently in district discussions regarding the status of their plans. Similarly, our special education cooperative colleagues are in those same discussions and decision-making with many moving to full remote as well. We are all navigating the growing community rates and intense focus on continuing to focus on safety for all.

In light of the stay at home advisory and combined metrics, **NSSEO will extend our adaptive pause on in-person learning beyond November 30th as previously stated.** The daily state updates are sobering, and the number of cases continue to rise across our region and the state. According to the CCDPH, the pause will last at least 30 days. Given the current status of these metrics and advisory, **NSSEO will not resume in-person instruction until Winter Break concludes in January.** We will reevaluate the plan based on the combination of external and internal metrics during the coming weeks and will update our NSSEO community in mid-December regarding whether we will be resuming a hybrid plan on Monday, January 4th as scheduled, or if we will need to extend the Adaptive Pause further into January. Our sincere hopes are that this extended adaptive pause, in collaboration with many of our member districts, will allow the time and mitigation efforts to take effect, that would result in a steady decrease in rates of COVID-19 in our community, so that NSSEO can resume in-person services for students in January.

During this extended Adaptive Pause, all NSSEO programs will continue in full distance learning. With safety as the priority, we believe that distance learning is in the best interest of student and staff safety today and for the weeks ahead. As we continue to monitor the COVID-19 positivity rates in our community, collaborate with our districts, our local public health

department and ISBE, we look forward to resuming in-person learning as soon as it is safe to do so.

As parents, you continue to bear such a heavy burden of supporting the learning process at home these many months and associated challenges. We are in awe of your strength, perseverance and understanding during an incredibly long and difficult year compounded by this second wave of the relentless COVID pandemic. These next few weeks of distance learning will continue to be effective and individualized for your children through our continued partnerships. In the next few weeks, your child's team will reach out to engage in problem solving and collaborative discussions to continue refinement of a plan for distance learning that meets the needs of your child and your family during this extended period.

During the days and weeks ahead during the extended Adaptive Pause, we will continue to provide opportunities for families to enjoy time at Sunrise Lake Outdoor Education Center (SLOEC). Additional information regarding how to reserve a time slot for your family will be sent in the coming days. In addition, NSSEO Professional Learning department has planned numerous meaningful parent sessions in the coming weeks. A flyer is attached to this email. Please consider taking advantage of these opportunities to learn, connect, and support one another. Our coaching staff are also prepared to share resources with families that need additional training and support on navigating distance learning through technology. You can look for those resources to be sent after Thanksgiving.

Monday, November 30th will shift to a Remote Learning Planning day to provide NSSEO staff the opportunity to plan and collaborate for extended distance learning. Following the Thanksgiving holiday, ***Distance Learning for students will resume on Tuesday, December 1st.***

None of us could have imagined back in March when our world abruptly shifted that we would be where we are today, in the midst of the second wave of this pandemic and losing ground. While this phase at this time is disheartening, we are leaning into the positives, how teams have learned to create, adapt and grow despite the obstacles. We will continue our efforts, our innovative ideas, our state and federal advocacy for students with special needs and how we can continue to design meaningful learning opportunities. Our sincere appreciation for your perseverance, understanding and ongoing collaborative school family partnerships that guide our shared focus on your child's educational needs. Together with determination, strength and hope we will get through this. Please take care.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Judy Hackett".

Judy Hackett, Ed.D.