

State forcing schools to cancel spring recess

Aid at risk for districts that fail to follow state order of continuing online instruction through April 14

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Many school districts are canceling plans to observe spring recess, as an executive order from Gov. Andrew Cuomo requires that remote teaching continue through April 14, including on religious holidays.

Districts that do not offer instruction on all weekdays through that date, including vacation days, could lose state aid, a pressing concern at a time when Cuomo is already warning of aid cuts.

The news will disappoint some who hoped for a reprieve from the breakneck pace of creating and adapting online instruction over the last month, when schools began to close because of the coronavirus.

“We hear from some superintendents that teachers and families are desperate for a break,” Bob Lowry, deputy director for the state Council of School Superintendents, said in an email.

What will school districts in New York do for spring break?

As of Tuesday afternoon, it remained unclear whether districts supposed to continue instruction on

religious holidays that fall before April 14. Passover begins on the evening of April 8. Holy Thursday is April 9, Good Friday is April 10, and Easter Monday is April 13.

David Albert, spokesperson for the New York State School Boards Association, said he did not expect the governor’s office to allow days off on religious holidays.

“We have brought concerns from our members about religious holidays,” he said. “Whether they make policy changes is up to them.”

Through the day Tuesday, many districts sent notices to their communities saying that their planned recesses would be canceled, with online learning continuing. Several said that some teachers would be unavailable, or less

available, on religious holidays.

Districts also must contend with union contracts that call for teachers and other staff to be off during spring recess. Most districts had spring recess scheduled for a period during the weeks of April 6-10 and 13-17.

must continue to provide remote instruction for students, meals for students, and child care for essential workers every weekday between April 1, 2020, and April 14, 2020, even if the district is scheduled to be on spring break during that time.”

Most districts that had planned to stop online instruction during spring recess were going to strive to continue delivering meals and child care.

For districts to continue instruction during previously negotiated breaks on school calendars, teacher unions must agree to the change, perhaps in exchange for future compensation or time off.

“Districts will have to work with their unions to find a path forward,” Albert said.

Schools still determining their plans for year

Districts began scrambling over the weekend to figure out if they could continue plans to stop instruction for spring recess.

That’s because Cuomo’s executive order issued Friday said that districts must “exhaust any available time” for instruction, including vacation days, or they could fail to meet the state requirement of 180 days of schools over 10 months and lose state aid.

The state Education Department sent districts a clarification late Monday afternoon that included: “Districts

The Education Department referred questions to the governor’s office.

One district that canceled plans for spring recess is White Plains.

“I wanted my people to take a breath and get a break, but I also understand what needs to be done,” Superintendent Joe Ricca said. “So do our teachers. They understand what needs to be done. I think everybody is doing their best. It’s a challenge for everybody, but we’re going to get through it.”

Ricca said the district reached an agreement with its teachers union to figure out how to honor their contract when the coronavirus crisis is over.