

# Governor continues closures of schools

Classrooms won’t reopen the rest of academic year

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New York State Team | USA TODAY NETWORK

ALBANY - Gov. Andrew Cuomo said Friday that K-12 schools and colleges will remain closed statewide for the rest of the school year.

He did not say when schools might reopen, saying decisions on summer school and the fall have yet to be determined. Online learning will continue through the academic year.

“There will be no opening of any school in the state for the remainder of the academic calendar year,” he said.

“We have to decide on summer school. That decision will be made by the end of May. There is no decision on the fall because the fall is a long time away.”

The announcement was expected at the current order on school closures was set to expire May 15.

Cuomo called on school districts to develop plans to reopen schools that incorporate all public-safety precautions.

But he acknowledged that social distancing could be very difficult in

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K-12 schools.

That’s why, he said, as New York looks to reopen some industries, it would simply be too difficult to do so in the short term with schools as the number of deaths due to COVID-19 exceeded 18,000 in New York, the national epicenter for the virus.

“It’s one thing to say you can figure out how to socially distance in construction or in a manufacturing facility with adults,” Cuomo continued.

objected and said he would make the call based on reopening plans for downstate and the tri-state region.

On Friday, Cuomo again said that reopening schools would be a key step toward reopening businesses and the economy.

“The big question is are you ready to open the schools in September?” he said.

On Tuesday, Cuomo announced a 100-plus member “reopening advisory board” that included no one currently working in K-12 education.

“To say we’re going to figure out that plan (for schools) and put it in place in the next few weeks is virtually impossible.”

**What happens next with schools in New York?**

Cuomo said a decision on holding summer school would be announced by the end of May.

The coronavirus infection rate would have to be stabilized, he said, for summer school to be held.

New York becomes the 44th state to have ordered or recommended that schools remain closed for the rest of the school year, which ends in May in some states.

New Jersey and Connecticut haven’t made an official decision.

School districts and parents have been eager for some long-term direction from New York, which oversees nearly 700 districts.

Many want to focus on how best to conclude this school year — expect virtual graduations — and to begin ramping up planning for the fall, either in-person classes or to improve online learning, or quite possibly do both.

“They should start preparing their plans now, because this is going to be a real exercise,” Cuomo said He explained how difficult it would be to social distance kids in the classroom or on buses, particularly young students. Or even college students in dorms, he said.

“How do I get students not to social distance? How do you get a 10-yearold not to social distance?” Cuomo asked.

“We’re going to err on the side of caution now, that’s for the remainder of the year.”

**A reluctance to close schools in New York**

Since the first days of dealing with the coronavirus, Cuomo had been adamant that he did not want to close schools because doing so would make it more difficult for parents to work.

The goal is to open businesses first that can social distance, but the ultimate goal to any broad-based reopening would have to include reopening schools so parents go to their jobs as kids return to the classroom, Cuomo said.

Education Chancellor Betty Rosa and interim Commissioner Shannon Tahoe said the decision to close schools is the right one.

“We are continuously inspired by the work of educators, staff and parents across the state to provide instruction throughout the pandemic,” they said in a statement.

“We know it hasn’t always been easy, but we must continue to forge ahead for the benefit of our students.”

They announced their own statewide task force to guide the reopening of schools. They said the task force would share recommendations with Cuomo’s advisory board on business reopenings.

“By working with our partners across the state, we can ensure that our children’s educational, developmental and overall well being is considered during this important discussion,” Rosa and Tahoe said.

Educational leaders have been increasingly focused through April on what it will take to eventually reopen school buildings, a complex task if social distancing and health checks will be required of students and staff.

Districts are exploring various split schedules so that fewer students would be in schools at a time.

But having students come in for half days or every other day would likely require additional bus routes, more frequent sanitizing of schools, longer school days, and updated online learning that would supplement in-school instruction.

Schools also anticipate that students will return to schools with an assortment of mental-health challenges, as well as academic deficiencies.

But districts face steep financial challenges, with state aid cuts likely, and may have have to cut staff and programs over the next few weeks

He signed an executive order on March 16 that directed all schools in New York to close from March 18 to April 1. He then extended the closures in two-week increments, through April 15, April 29 and May 15.

and months.

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When New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio announced on May 11 that the city’s schools would remain closed for the rest of the school year, Cuomo immediately