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WVEA Concerned for School Employees during the COVID-19 Crisis

CHARLESTON, W.Va. – The following statement is from WVEA President Dale Lee:

“We understand these are unprecedented times and that everything is fluid and constantly changing as we confront the COVID-19 crisis. The daily updates from the medical professionals, federal and state officials make it clear that this is a rapidly spreading pandemic and we should all heed their advice and recommendations.

The most recent recommendations suggest that people stay in as much as possible and avoid groups of over 10 people. They also tell workers to work from home instead of reporting to their worksite.

WV has followed that message with our students, but some county school systems refuse to clearly lift the mandate of education employees being required to report to worksites. We have had numerous discussions with state leaders regarding the reporting requirements and they insist they have given county superintendents the guidance to allow employees to use flexibility and remain at home if they don’t feel safe in reporting to their worksite.

While that flexibility is to be commended, unfortunately, that guidance is not being followed and employees are being denied that flexibility in some counties throughout our state.

WVEA urges our governor and state superintendent to issue a clear statement that there are no mandatory reporting requirements for any school employees to their worksite. Furthermore, they need to issue such a statement immediately before one of the employees being denied that flexibility reports symptoms of the virus.

School employees have lessons prepared for students while they are home and are making themselves available to students and checking in on them. They have the ability to work remotely and they should be allowed to do that.

I’m touched by how everyone has stepped up to accept the challenges that have been presented to us. Many employees (both teachers and service professionals) have been in schools every day this week working on instruction and helping bag lunches and get them delivered. Some have been working in their classrooms while others are preparing and delivering instruction remotely.

But we are now in a new phase of the pandemic and the inflexibility in granting employees flexibility to stay home has become critical. I understand that many of our children rely on our schools to provide their meals, but the employees should not be put in harm’s way in order to meet that requirement. The state needs to ask for volunteers (both employees and community volunteers) or National Guard to come into our schools and to assist with meal preparation and delivery.

We understand these are challenging times. Our school employees will rise to that challenge, but the health and well-being of the employees and their families should not be compromised.”