

## ESC of Northeast Ohio

### District Support during COVID-19

Since the Governor's order to close schools, we have provided much less direct service to school districts (i.e. curriculum consultants, coaching, etc.) simply because this is not what they need during this time. Initially, they needed time and space to work internally with their team to make a dramatic shift and work through logistics over the course of a weekend. Since this time, the ESC has primarily served in a role to convene, inform, research and follow-up. This includes group webinars, written updates and one-on-one conversations and emails with district administrators. A description of this large-scale, indirect work with our 47 client districts, as well as the initial direct services, are shared below.

#### **Indirect Support with Leadership**

Our support with our schools began as the Coronavirus crisis was developing, before it even hit Ohio. We were receiving some questions and call from districts for more guidance and began distributing guidance from the CDC, ODE, OSBA, etc. as it became available. We held a webinar with the Cuyahoga County Board of Health to our Leadership Roundtable on March 10<sup>th</sup> with the intent of answering questions districts had. As it turned out, the cases in Cuyahoga County were confirmed the day before the webinar so there were many questions about what districts can/should do and expect answered by the BOH. This webinar ended up including the Cleveland Diocese and other non-public schools. We had over 80 people register and participate in the webinar. During this time, the Board of Health provided a great update as to what they knew at that time and the districts had an opportunity to ask questions as they tried to make decisions regarding trips, events, etc. We hosted, facilitated and recorded this webinar, then shared it with our districts and others that participated and also posted in on the front page of our website.

Prior to the Governor's order to close schools we also created a Google folder for districts to share all of their PR and Communication efforts that focused on prevention and safety in the districts. We also created a Google document where districts could begin uploading their decisions around trips, events, etc. due to initial travel restrictions and then bans on gathering. Predicting an update from the Governor, on Wednesday (3/11), the conversations shifted from travel and large group events to ways a district can support learning, special education services and food provision for students should they end up closing. This carried over into Thursday (3/12) in a previously scheduled First Ring district meeting that became a webinar so Superintendents could stay in their district. We knew then that there would be a press conference with the Governor that afternoon – and set up a second conference call with districts to quickly debrief after the call. This was the press conference in which the Governor order the closure of schools as of the end of the day Monday, March 16<sup>th</sup>.

As districts learned they had to close no later than Monday afternoon (3/16), it accelerated the planning for online education, special education services, etc., but Superintendents were then faced with the decisions as to whether they closed prior to Monday to allow for teacher PD on virtual learning and which staff would be required to report to work while schools were closed.

In the midst of trying to be as flexible as possible, Superintendents are also faced with equity issues (not all students have access to the internet), union issues (who has to work when) and federal and state regulations that they are required to meet. These were all unanswered questions during the time Superintendents were trying to make decisions. We then created a new Google folder for “COVID-19” and are using subfolders for PR, planning documents, Board of Health webinar and materials, extended learning plans, district resources, federal regulations, Executive orders, etc. We continue to update this resource for districts and are encouraging our colleagues to share with each other. We also created and sent joint letter on Friday, March 13<sup>th</sup> between ESCNEO, Connect and ESC of Lorain County/NORT2H to remind districts of all the ways we can support them in technology integration and professional development as their teams finalize plans for virtual learning.

Over the last two weeks, our priority has been to keep district leaders informed and answer – or get answers – to their questions during this time of school closure. This has been an ongoing task as new information is shared each day and with more answers come more questions or more decisions. Again, our role has been to regionally inform districts on state updates from the Governor, ODE, the General Assembly while regularly convening them so they have opportunities to learn from each other as the work changes. We have been doing this through webinars with different groups of administrators from our client districts, which are now scheduled weekly (i.e. Superintendents, First Ring Superintendents, Pupil Services, Principals, etc.). After each webinar, the ESC follows up with requested resources, information or clarification.

As of Wednesday’s (3/25) passage of HB197, information has been continuously shared with districts that was either received from state associations, such as OESCA, or gathered from the Ohio Legislative Service Commission. This Friday (3/27) included a weekly Leadership Roundtable with Superintendents from our client districts and we presented a PPT Summary of HB197 to give them a comprehensive, but straightforward resource to understand HB197 (attached to this email). The Roundtable ended with additional next steps for clarification on HB197 and monitoring of new ODE rules that will be developed with the authority given to the State Superintendent.

We had a discussion today (3/27) with the Education Program Officer for The Cleveland Foundation regarding the Cleveland Rapid Response Fund. We will be facilitating a discussion with our higher poverty, inner ring districts about submitting an application to the Rapid Response Fund in order to address some of the basic needs where inequity has become more of a factor than ever before in students accessing their education. The ESC will lead the effort over the next week or two to complete and submit a proposal.

### **Direct Support**

Our ESC consultants continue to maintain contact with those they supported within districts to help teams or individuals create solutions. These are ad-hoc, right now, and at no-cost to the district. We also changed several of our upcoming professional development opportunities into online courses or webinars so that district staff could continue to increase their learning, even while remote. Our most

prominent service was a five-part series on virtual learning tools. This was initially an in-person series that was revised to five webinars at no costs to districts. Each webinar filled up within two days with about 100 participants. The webinars were recorded and posted on our website along with the notes.

As district begin to receive answers from HB197, ODE and future orders from the Governor, they will be able to make more concrete plans for educating students for the remainder of the school year. In this phase, we anticipate they will look again to the ESC for specific, direct services for their administrators, educators or students. Under the assumption that the schools will remain closed for the rest of the school year, we sent a survey last week to solicit other types of unique direct services they may need specifically to address their efforts. We are slowly getting responses back, which will determine how we move forward. This may include a clearinghouse of access to high-quality educational resources, creation of online learning materials for particular grades/subjects, broad training for staff in virtual learning platforms, or direct coaching for teachers in virtual learning or strategies for virtually serving students with special needs. Districts have not indicated that assistance is needed, yet, for other operational support, such as food distribution, etc. Even beyond the survey, we will also always find a way to provide a service that any district may realize is necessary. Districts are just now beginning to consider these options as they settle into a “new normal”. Our internal teams continue to meet virtually to develop new levels of support that can be provided when districts are ready.