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November 2, 2012

TO: Chief School Administrators  
Charter School Lead persons

FROM: Christopher D. Cerf, Commissioner

SUBJECT: Hurricane Sandy Update

Over the past few days, as we have all begun to recover from Hurricane Sandy, we are beginning to understand the enormity of the challenge in front of us. How do we return to normalcy when many of us are still without power and struggling with widespread devastation to homes and schools? How do we balance the needs of our communities to use our schools for shelters with the need to help students return to class and a regular routine?

And yet, during this time, we have seen amazing acts of compassion and support. As just one example, Wood-Ridge School District has generously opened its doors to share space with the 280 students from Moonachie, a town devastated by flooding. Those students will be able to attend class again on Tuesday.

Realizing the tremendous need for information as we struggle to get our state up and running, I will be sending regular emails to provide information and to respond to frequent questions from the field. For those still without power, I will be posting these at <http://education.state.nj.us/broadcasts/> so that you can retrieve them throughout the coming week.

In addition, we are asking our Executive County Superintendents to report to us, at both the school and district level, when schools are planning to open and where structural damage and other barriers such as power or flooding have made a building uninhabitable. We will be using this data to coordinate support from the state level.

Currently we have 12 of our 21 county offices back online and with power. However, I know communication is difficult right now. We ask you first to reach out to your Executive County Superintendents with any questions or concerns. But if, for whatever reason, you are unable to reach them or hear back from them within one day, we ask that you call us directly to ensure you get a response. Please call 609-341-3613 at any time in these instances and we will respond to you as quickly as possible.

**Q: Because the NJEA convention has been cancelled next week, can we or should we open schools next Thursday and Friday?**

A: I appreciate the significant logistical challenges the NJEA faced in deciding to cancel their annual convention. I want to personally commend them for reaching a decision that reflects sensitivity to the needs of students, schools and districts as they work to return to normalcy in the aftermath of the storm. Many districts have lost nearly a full week of school and some are struggling to reopen even next week. Returning our students to the classroom is a critical priority. In light of the cancellation of the convention, I strongly urge districts and teachers to work together to hold classes next week to ensure our students do not lose any additional instructional time.

**Q: Will the state waive the 180 day requirement for school days given the extended closures this week?**

A: This is something that we will consider in the days and weeks ahead, but at this point no decisions have been made. Our number one focus right now is helping schools get back online and helping students return to the classroom. I will share more information in the coming days as we address this question.

**Q: Will there be any delay in payments of state aid that were due this week?**

A: The state aid payment will go out as planned on November 8, and the nonpublic nursing payment went out on November 1 as planned. However, the Nonpublic Chapters 192/193 payments will be delayed due to storm damage to the state's system. It is anticipated that this will be repaired in time for the payment to go out next week.

**Q: Will the deadline for data and audit submissions due this week be extended?**

A: We are extending each of the following data submissions as listed below. For those school districts that were severely impacted by the storm, we will work with you individually to help accommodate your circumstances.

- Application for State School Aid (ASSA) submission deadline is moved from October 31<sup>st</sup> to November 9<sup>th</sup> for all school districts. Revised timelines will be forthcoming.
- Debt Service data collection deadline is moved from November 1<sup>st</sup> to November 9<sup>th</sup>.
- Charter School Enrollment System data collection deadline is moved from November 2<sup>nd</sup> to November 9<sup>th</sup>.
- District Report of Transported Resident Students (DRTRS) submission deadline is moved from October 31<sup>st</sup> to November 9<sup>th</sup>.
- The audit due date for private schools for students with disabilities (PSSD) is moved from November 1<sup>st</sup> to November 9<sup>th</sup>. Extensions beyond that date may be requested in accordance with N.J.A.C. 6A:23A-5. Waiver applications are available via this link: <http://www.state.nj.us/education/sboe/ew/> and should be submitted to the county office in which the PSSD is located. An application for a waiver of the audit due date should include the circumstances of the delayed submission as well as the expected submission date.

**Q: Will the 11/2 deadline for districts to verify student enrollment for student Interdistrict School Choice applications be extended?**

A: Yes. The deadline will be extended until November 16 for students' letters of intent and to November 26 for districts to confirm student eligibility. We will send updated web links and information next week.

**Q: Will the US Department of Education extend the deadline for district Race to the Top applications?**

A: The US Department of Education made this statement this morning: “For school districts in states affected by Hurricane Sandy and for which the President has issued either a major disaster declaration or an emergency declaration (see <http://www.fema.gov/disasters/>), the new Race to the Top-District deadline is Wednesday, November 7, 2012, at 4:30 p.m. Washington, D.C. time.”

We recognize that there are dozens of outstanding questions that you have, and we will do our best to address these throughout next week. Among others, these include questions about how to enroll or serve displaced students, questions about how the storm might affect testing schedules, and how districts can work with the State to ensure disaster aid is received quickly and efficiently.

If you have additional questions, I’d recommend you reach out to Justin Barra at [justin.barra@doe.state.nj.us](mailto:justin.barra@doe.state.nj.us) and we will be sure to address them in the coming days.