



Good morning my Sisters and Brothers. As you know, Governor Cuomo issued an executive order, ordering all districts to remain open.

Districts “must continue to provide remote instruction for students, meals for students, and childcare 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,” the state Education Department said Monday. It was part of a department clarification on school calendar requirements in light of the executive orders through the governor’s office. Due to this we are required to give up our spring break.

In the interest of full disclosure, I was only notified of this early Tuesday, March 31st. I received a call from Dr. Lutz in the early afternoon. Up until that time I thought that we were going to have our break. Things changed with the Governor’s executive order. As you may or may not be aware, state law supersedes contractual law. We have little choice but to comply.

I know that many of you have been giving 150 percent to your respective jobs and on behalf of the parents and students of Eastern Suffolk BOCES and the BEES I thank you. Instructional, itinerant and support staff have been doing an outstanding job in this most difficult and challenging of times. I understand that the stresses are tremendous. Many of you are working from 6 am to 6 pm and all this while juggling your own day care issues. Life is hitting us on all sides, family obligations, work related stress and the ever-present worry that there may be a ventilator in our, or a loved one’s future. We all need a break, we know this. I ask that you be mindful when “planning” for this week. Be *creative* in how to have contact with students. Please allow for and understand that many of them

like us, have religious holy days that need to be honored and may be unavailable for daily distance learning at different times between 4/9-4/19.

I understand that we are under intense pressure, but THIS WILL END. We will come through it, a bit worn down but stronger than ever.

I would just like to share my thoughts as to our role in this fight and be assured my sisters and brothers this is a fight against all of the chaos caused by covid-19. The governor has stated the case plainly. We are at war. We are not being shot at or bombed but the effects of this pandemic are as wide ranging and devastating as a shooting war on both the health and economic fronts. Never in our nation's history has our economy collapsed so quickly and widely. In comparison the economy of the United States in the Great depression collapsed in slow motion and was statistically not as high as the numbers we see now. All this has occurred in a mere few weeks. We need to step up and do our part. All of us are on the front lines. No one gets to hide. If we lose our break because of government decree, then that is the way it is. Tens of millions of our fellow citizens are without jobs on this April 1st. We are working and being paid. Think of those unemployed as they scramble to pay their bills and survive, and we are worried about our five days. They would view us as petty, ungrateful and short sighted to say the least. And my friends think of how this would be viewed by our component districts that are working, the politicians that normally support us and the Governor in Albany. Make no mistake my sisters and brothers after this is over, we will need friends in districts and in Albany more than ever. It is my opinion that after this crisis is resolved then we will have to face the unfolding effects of the economic disaster.

We have negotiated to obtain two additional PPD's or Pandemic Personal Days for the direct instruction and itinerant staff to be used before we return to school. These days will not carry over to next year. They must be utilized before the shutdown ends and we return to school. That would include the entire blue contract and those Teacher Assistants bumped up to cover their respective classes.

We also will receive an extra personal day next year for **both** the yellow and blue contracts. Julie Lutz and the Agency have shown exceptional leadership in this crisis and remain very sensitive to both what we are going through and where we are headed.

We, my friends are in this fight like it or not. We do not have a choice. It is time to gear up as the soldiers say. I just want you to know how proud I am to represent you and how very grateful for the support that many of you have expressed. For those of you who have been a bit more negative and want to know what the union is doing I urge you to read our Beacon articles online as well as to sign up for our union text blast by texting the word BEES to 33222. We are dedicated to being fully transparent and providing the most up to date information to our members. Also, we are remaining in contact with our LRS, William Oquendo as we attempt to negotiate our MOA's. Our state union is fighting to protect our education budget in Albany and NYSUT is working on planning for the future. It is your responsibility to stay informed especially those who refuse to share their emails.

I wish you all continued good health. Be kind to each other. Take a deep breath and let's be thankful for all we have. Know that we (your union) are here to support you both now and in the future and to protect you in the work you do. Unity and strength,

Jim