

Governor closes schools

Local officials prepared for long-term online learning

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COLUMBIA — South Carolina's public schools will remain closed and online learning will continue for more than another month after an announcement Tuesday

from Gov. Henry McMaster in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

But local school officials weren't surprised by the announcement.

"The adjustments we've been making have been to try to adjust to doing e-learning indefinitely," School District

of Pickens County spokesman John Eby said Tuesday afternoon. "We anticipated that the closure would be extended, and it's a bigger challenge to shift from a daylong plan to a multi-week plan than it is to extend the multi-week plan. The heaviest

lifting is done on that front."

McMaster said students, parents and families should plan for schools throughout the state to remain closed through the end of April. The governor also praised "our dedicated teachers and school

administrators" who "have done a tremendous job in making it possible for our students to learn at home."

Schools were officially closed last week per order of the governor and originally slated to remain closed through the end of March due to concerns over the spread of COVID-19. But

SEE SCHOOLS, PAGE A5

through April

The latest news means that instruction from home via the use of Chromebooks will continue.

For schools such as Central Academy for the Arts, which relies on hands-on activities, that can be especially challenging.

"Our related arts teachers sent home handouts to students in 4-year-old kindergarten through second-grade with ideas, and they are posting activities on Schoology for our third through fifth-graders," principal Tish Goode said.

Administrators are also having to get used to what is the new normal, at least for the foreseeable future.

Ravenel Elementary principal Angie Henderson said principals are staying pretty busy.

"I find myself on the phone with parents and teachers helping them troubleshoot technology issues, and we also have an awesome technology hotline set up," Henderson said. "We are also continuing to hold IEP (individualized education plan, for special needs students) as they come through Google Meet, and many teachers are also hosting class sessions daily through Google Meet as well. There are many apps available to our teachers for submitting work and getting feedback, and students



To read more about the COVID-19 pandemic, turn to page D1. In addition, all of The Journal's daily coronavirus coverage is available for free online at upstatetoday.com.

can log on and the teacher can have live instructional time with them."

Henderson added that interventionists, special education teachers, gifted and talented and related arts teachers are also having to be creative.

"I spend time with them helping them to develop lessons on how to best meet the needs of their students, and for related arts, we have sent out a weekly calendar of activities," she said. "Our special education teachers are also providing services through Google Meet and posting live videos of them instructing specific lessons."

Principals and teachers are also having to juggle

education for students at their particular school, along with their own children's educational needs from a home setting.

"I am navigating preschool, elementary, middle and high school online sessions," Henderson said of her four children, ages 3-14.

The School District of Oconee County is recommending that parents establish a visual schedule each day and post it in their home, pointing out that schedules and routines are a core part of the school day and help provide an opportunity for normalcy during this time. Teachers are required by the state Department of Education to grade some assignments as well as give assignments.

School district officials are warning parents that student Chromebooks are

unusable without district log-in credentials. No personal programs or games can be downloaded, and they cannot be used as a regular family computer. The computers also have little monetary value. All district devices are filtered, and any inappropriate search or content is reported to school administrators.

While schools are closed through the end of April, officials say it is too early to determine what will happen with graduations scheduled in May.

"That's too far out," Eby said. "I think it would be safe to say we want to get through at least the first week of this before we start looking seriously at graduation ceremonies."

As far as actual academic graduation is concerned, Eby added that officials are seeking

guidance from the State Department of Education.