

November 1, 2020

After much deliberation, the members of the SDCTM/SDSTA Joint Board have made the difficult decision to cancel the 2021 SD STEM Ed Conference. This decision was made with consideration for the health and well-being of attendees, the uncertainty in the current environment, and the policy restrictions and health risks associated with large gatherings. Because of the many unknowns regarding the COVID-19 pandemic, it has been decided that there is no safe way to conduct an in-person event. There are just too many variables, and not enough solutions.

This decision was not made lightly.

- The health of our members is our primary concern. In a time of surging COVID numbers, hosting a large gathering is inadvisable.
- In a time of constantly changing information, predicting the COVID situation three months in advance is impossible. Significant planning for the conference starts many months before the February event. Delaying the decision long enough to “see what happens” is simply not possible.
- If a decision were made to host the conference, plans must be made for registration, catering, travel, hotel, and meeting rooms. These plans are put into place months before the event. A last-minute decision to cancel would require refunding of registration dollars, but all other bills would still need to be paid. This would be a significant financial exposure for SDSTA and SDCTM.
- A last-minute cancellation would require that we notify all vendors and registrants. It would be a tremendous task to notify everyone in a timely manner.
- Very few session proposals were received this year. This undoubtedly reflects the uncertainty of our presenters regarding the February prognosis. With so few break-out sessions available, the quality of our conference would be impacted.
- SD STEM Ed brings in nationally known speakers for our keynote and featured presentations. As a current hotspot, South Dakota is not exactly a place that they are excited to visit. Additionally, their travel expenses are paid by the conference. Once reservations are made, we are financially committed, even if we cancel later.
- Many schools have informed their staff that no out-of-town conference attendance will be allowed this year. In addition to concern about the personal health of their teachers, there are concerns regarding contagion and bringing a virus back home to their schools. This could dramatically reduce our expected attendance.
- Many schools are already reporting difficulty finding substitute teachers. If a substitute cannot be found teachers may be denied professional leave to attend.
- The health of our Executive Board members is a big concern. They are the workers who make the conference happen. The possibility of illness/quarantine preventing their attendance is real.
- If an attendee becomes very ill, and the source is traced back to our event, SD STEM Ed could possibly be determined at fault and sued for damages.
- National affiliates (NCTM and others) have already cancelled in-person events for spring 2021.

We will miss you all and look forward to seeing you in Huron for 2022! Save the date: tentatively scheduled for Feb. 3-5 2022.

SDCTM/SDSTA JPDC Executive Board Members

Crystal McMachen  
Dan Van Peursem  
Sheila McQuade  
Jay Berglund  
Amy Schander  
Mark Kreie

Michelle Bartels  
Ashley Armstrong  
Mark Iverson  
James Stearns  
Tiffany Kroeger  
Julie Olson  
Cindy Kroon