



FLORIDA ASSOCIATION
OF SKILLSUSA

March 25, 2020

Dear SkillsUSA Florida Advisors,

I hope this finds you in good health and spirits during such a trying and difficult time. As educators, you have likely adapted your entire curriculum to teach virtually and are undoubtedly missing the daily connections with your students. On any regular day, I am in awe of your dedication to preparing your students for the future, but during this unprecedented time, your value in their lives has increased exponentially. You have risen to the occasion, and I am so grateful that you are working so tirelessly for them. Thank you for everything you do – now from your kitchen table, your couch, or your garage – and the support you continue to provide your students.

It's been a running joke with the state officer team that we are truly flexing one of the elements of the SkillsUSA framework: Adaptability and Flexibility – and boy, have I had some amazing opportunities to exercise those skills this month. I wanted to take a moment and send a more personal message about our decision-making process, and to share with you our next steps following the cancellation of the 2020 State Leadership and Skills Conference in Pensacola.

As the COVID-19 outbreak began to reach the US, we followed closely to see what would happen and how our organization would be affected. As the announcements rolled in, I knew this would drastically change the way we would look at the conference and began working with other state directors on the idea of alternative contest formats. We discussed having local events if you had just a few schools registered for a contest that may be able to meet in smaller groups. We also discussed virtual events, which could consist of project submission, video presentation or interview, or online written exam. We considered holding events on different days to reduce the number of people together at one time. With these options in mind, I called a meeting with the Board of Directors, scheduled for Tuesday, March 17.

As you all know, things escalated very quickly. Within days, school districts around Florida began implementing travel restrictions on their schools. Talks of finishing the school year virtually began to circulate. Limits on gathering sizes were cropping up across the country. More and more cases of COVID-19 in Florida were diagnosed. The decision was made for us when Florida Governor DeSantis issued state-wide school closures. Responding and respecting this decision, we came to a unanimous decision to cancel the 2020 State Leadership and Skills Conference in its entirety.

This decision was not made lightly. Given the current circumstances, the Board and I were not confident that we could provide a quality competitive event for our students, particularly given the uncertainty of the remainder of their education for the year, and the national conference. In many cases, our students pay their fees out of their own pocket, and even after reducing the conference fees we could not justify providing a sub-par experience to our student members. With schools out until April 15th – or longer – there were too many unanswered questions and not enough time to find the solutions.

The idea of disappointing our students, especially the seniors and those graduating their programs this year, was not easy to digest. I still struggle with the decision, even though I know it was for the good of our organization, our communities, our partners, our advisors, and, most importantly, our students. They have already faced canceled graduations, events, and proms, and it is gut-wrenching to make a decision that is another let-down for them. We are all still facing so many uncertainties with this outbreak, and there is no telling how long our everyday lives will be interrupted – but it's not likely it will be back to normal (whatever that is now) anytime soon.



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I've received many questions about how we will be moving forward in SkillsUSA Florida.

- **Elections:** We will still be electing our state officers for the 2020-2021 school year. If you have a candidate, Dave Moye will be in touch with you directly about plans for the election.
- **National Conference:** At this point, nationals has not decided whether they will cancel the event. Minute to minute changes across the country make it incredibly difficult to plan so far in advance, but nationals have promised to make an announcement by the week of April 13. At this time, Florida will not be participating in any national contests but will participate in delegate sessions to select national officers. We are not the only state to make this incredibly difficult decision.
- **Fall Leadership Conference:** Mark your calendars! Maximize, our new fall leadership conference format, will debut at the Hilton Daytona Beach on November 9-10, 2020, including a state-wide advisor meeting on November 9.
- **2021 State Conference & Beyond:** We are optimistic for 2021 and will begin working with the steering committee to plan the 2021 state conference on April 11-14, 2021. Along with the National Conference move to Atlanta in June of 2021, the 2020-2021 school year is going to be full of new and exciting opportunities.

Thank you for your dedication on this journey, and for your patience and support throughout the school year. You are changing lives every day don't always get to hear about the payoff. Seeing your students in competition provides an awesome window into the impact you are making, and I know canceling this event was disappointing for you as well. These quick and drastic transitions have not been easy on you, and we want to support you however we can.

SkillsUSA partners at the national level have created a coalition to provide resources and support to our chapters. Be sure to check out Keep CTE Moving at CTECoalition.com. I'm having weekly calls with Chelle Travis and the other directors and will continue to update you as details emerge. **If other resources or materials would be helpful for your virtual classrooms, please reach out and we will tap into whatever resources we have.**

We will get through this, and I am here for you in any way that I can support you – from six feet away or more, of course.

Wash your hands and stay healthy!

Best wishes,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jessica Donelan Graber".

Jessica Donelan Graber
SkillsUSA Florida
State Director