



Education

Coronavirus will keep N.J. schools closed at least through May 15, Murphy says

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New Jersey classrooms will stay empty as the state battles the coronavirus pandemic. Patti Sapone | NJ Advance Media

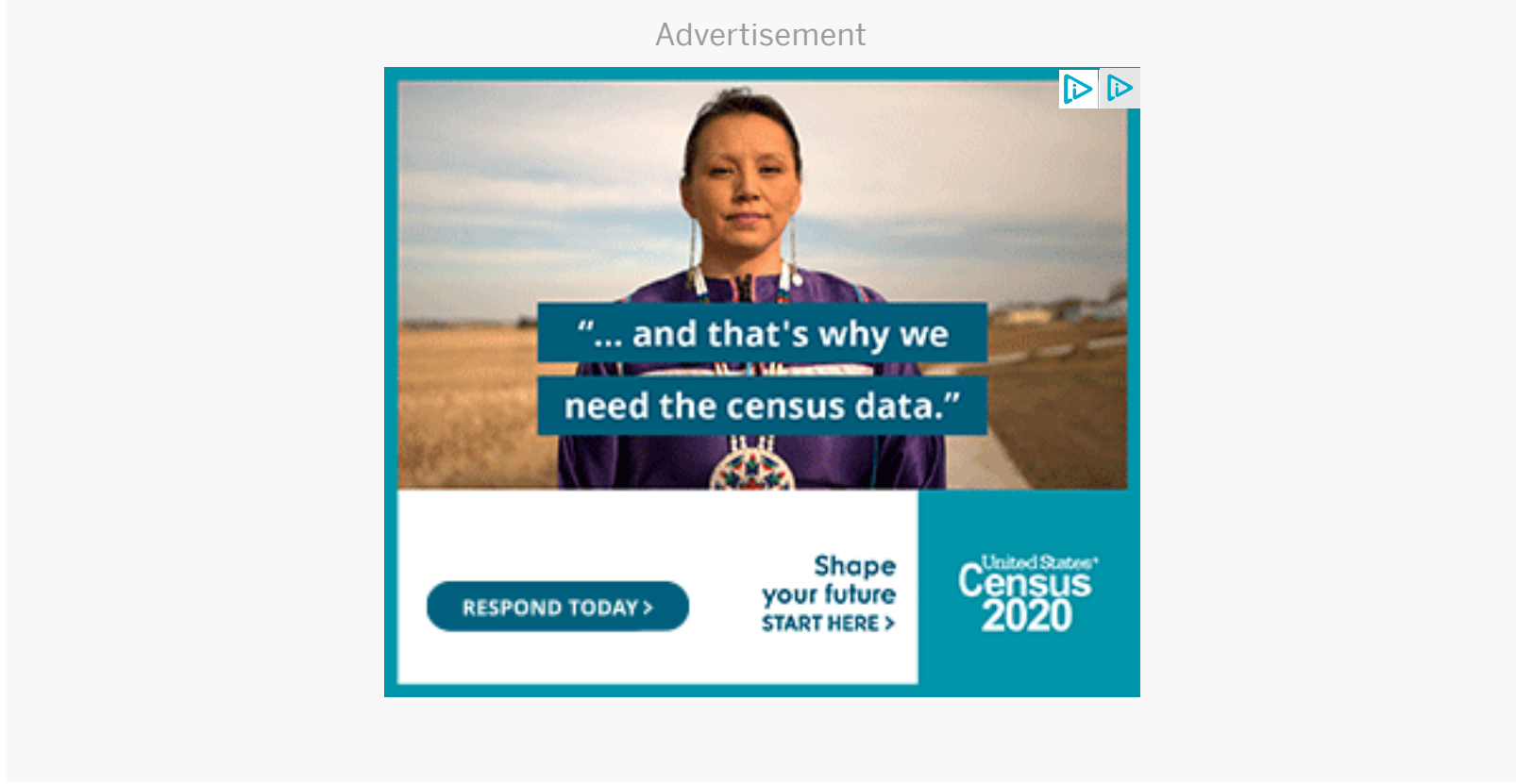
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By Adam Clark | NJ Advance Media for NJ.com and Brent Johnson | NJ Advance Media for NJ.com

New Jersey schools will be closed through at least May 15 because of the coronavirus pandemic, with the state's 1.4 million students continuing to learn from home, Gov. Phil Murphy announced Thursday.

Murphy initially ordered all schools in the Garden State — public and private, including pre-K and college — to close March 18 for at least two weeks. He later extended that closure to April 17, saying he would not reopen schools until medical experts tell him it's safe.



Now, his unprecedented order will last at least four more weeks.

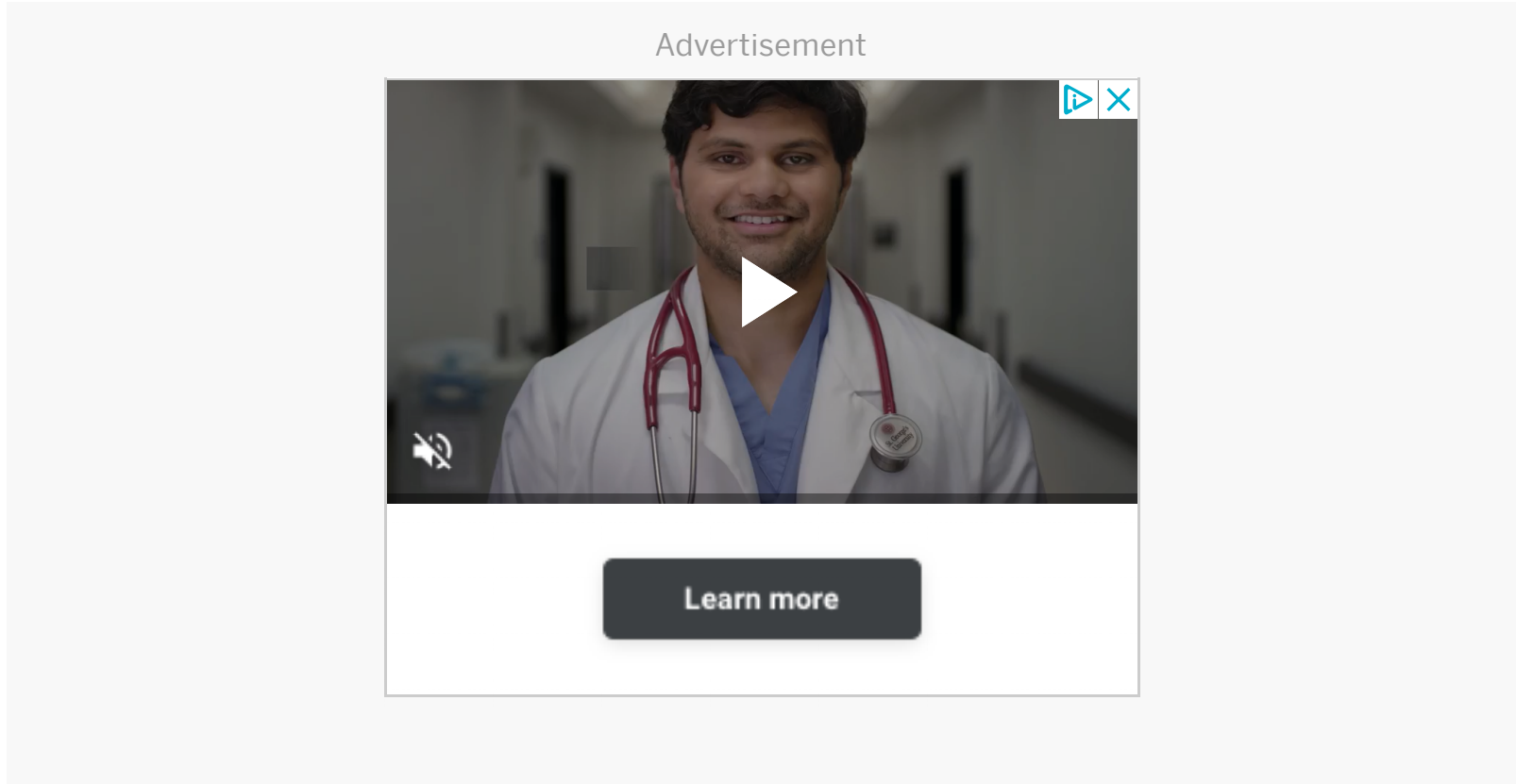
"Let me be perfectly clear, there is nobody who wants to open the schools more than I do," Murphy said at his daily press briefing in Trenton. "I can't do that right now."

The governor said he remains hopeful schools can reopen after May 15. However, he also said as recently as Tuesday that he did not expect a return to normalcy in New Jersey until June or July.

Murphy said the May 15 date gives the state at least "one more shot to reassess" whether schools can open this year. He's heard from parents of high school seniors about academics, sports and other experiences students are missing, he said.

"I have nothing but complete sympathy," Murphy said.

Students have been learning remotely with teachers providing online instruction and parents giving lessons at home. Meanwhile, Murphy said last week the chances of districts hosting 2020 graduation ceremonies in June appear dim.



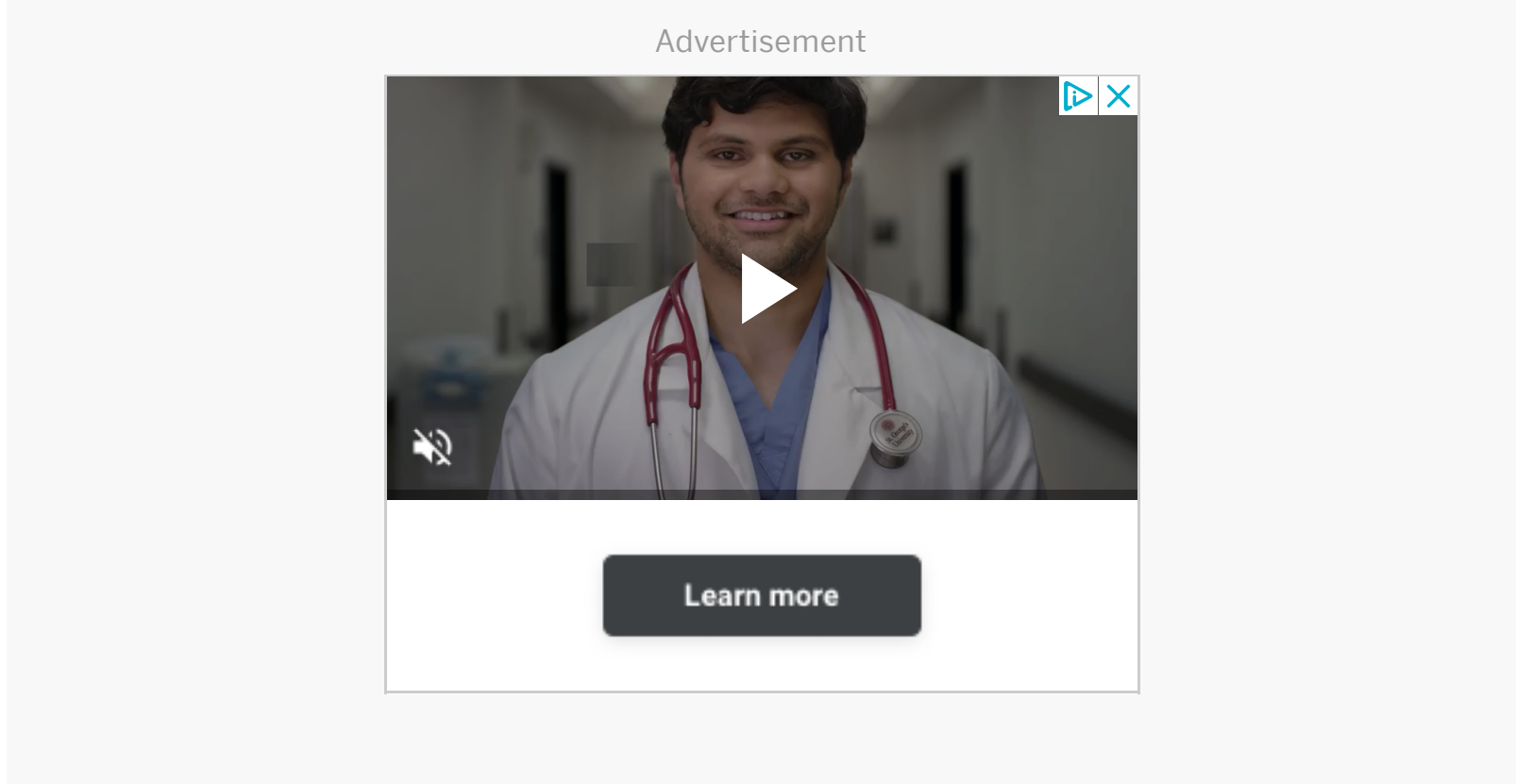
New Jersey now has at least 75,317 cases and 3,518 deaths from COVID-19, state officials announced Thursday. Only New York has more cases and deaths among U.S. states.

Health experts insist New Jersey needs to see a prolonged decline in infections, hospitalizations and fatalities before schools and other crowded buildings can reopen.

The governor has also ordered Garden State residents to stay home, banned social gatherings and mandated nonessential businesses in the state to close until further notice to help slow the virus' spread and ensure hospitals have enough patient capacity.

"We cannot be guided by emotion," Murphy said of his decision on schools. "We need to be guided by where the facts on the ground, science and public health take us."

The state's largest teachers union commended the extended closure.



"Until schools reopen, whenever that is, we remain committed to providing the best possible education and services under these current challenging circumstances," said Steve Baker, spokesman for the New Jersey Education Association.

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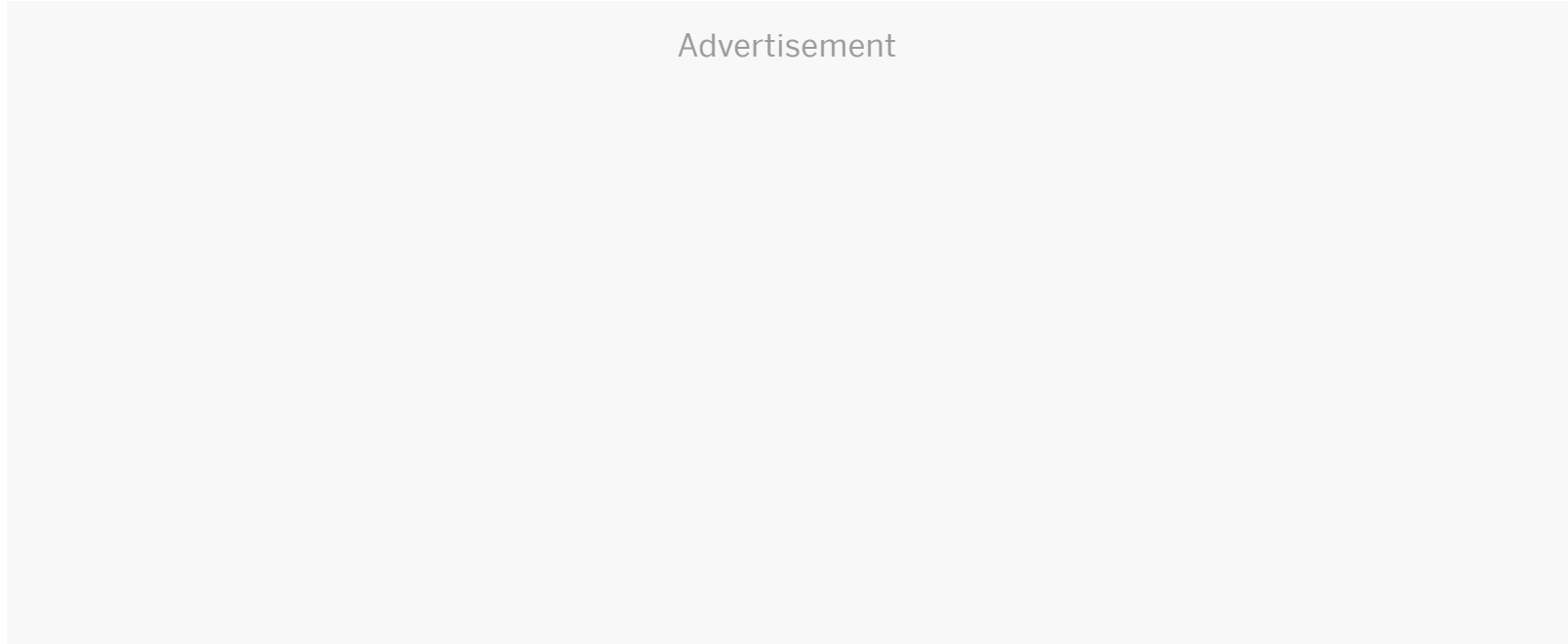
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