



**Bellefonte Area
School District**

Bellefonte Area School District

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**Mrs. Tammie L. Burnaford, Interim Superintendent
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Inspiring and Preparing Today's Learners to Embrace Tomorrow's Challenges

Jan. 24, 2021

Dear Bellefonte Area School District families, staff and community:

As promised, the sole purpose of this letter is to provide you with information about weather-related or emergency related closures and information about the difference between Remote Learning Days and Flexible Instructional Days (FIDs). PA School Code requires school districts to provide 180 days (or 900 hours for elementary or 990 hours for secondary) of instruction, and there both FIDs and Remote Learning Days provide compliance for the law. This letter contains a lot of information, but I also attached a chart that outlines the differences between the two types of days that may be used when schools are closed. If we would have a closure, it's very important for parents, staff, and students to listen for and understand the type of instruction we will have in the event of a closure.

How are decisions made about delays and closures?

The decisions about delays and closures are never easy. The weather in Central Pennsylvania is very unpredictable, and we often have to make decisions well before the storms begin. The local school districts are somewhat dependent on each other if school is delayed or cancelled due to interconnected transportation systems and our joint technical school, CPI. For example, we must provide transportation for students to private and charter schools in the State College district, if our schools are closed, but the State College schools are open. If CPI is open, and we are closed, our CPI students miss their classes at CPI. So, either during the evening before, or at 4:00 AM on the day of, the potential weather event, the superintendents from all Centre County school districts, as well as transportation directors from all of the districts join in a conference call.

However, before any discussions begin, we gather as much information as possible from a variety of sources. The National Weather Service sends several briefings to us via the NOAA system prior to the weather event. I attached the latest one to this email, so you can see what we receive from the NWS regularly. We follow all of the forecasts from Accuweather, the Weather

Channel, and all local TV stations. Depending on the circumstances, we may talk to the PA Department of Transportation and the State or local Police. In some cases, our transportation directors or other district personnel will go out and drive on the local roads to check the status. We know that delays and cancellations may cause hardships for parents, but we also know that safety must be our top priority. To be honest, sometimes it's a guessing game. I'm also a firm believer in trying to give parents as much notice as possible if we do need to delay or close, so I am a fan of making that decision and call the night before a pending storm. We try to make the best decisions as timely as possible, but we do get it wrong. I appreciate your understanding if we do get it wrong.

When it comes to poor weather conditions, we have several options - delays, early dismissals, complete closure (an old-fashioned snow day) , or using a Flexible Instruction Day. There are transportation implications for both delays and early dismissals. We need to give our bus and van companies enough notice and time to get the system rolling. Please note that if we have a delay or an early dismissal, no remote, online or virtual teaching/learning will occur during those hours.

You may have seen that the State College Area School District is not going to use their Remote Learning Days or Flexible Instructional Days should there be a weather-related closure anytime. Instead, according to news reports, they will have full snow days that will need to be made up later in the school year.

We are not ruling out the idea of snow days at Bellefonte. If you recall, we had an old fashioned snow day on Dec. 17th when all other local districts had remote learning or used FID's. However, a true snow day must be made up either during a snow make up day that was already built into the calendar or tacked on at the end of the year. This can cause complications for parents' plans and for graduation dates. So, it's a balance of knowing that sometimes students and families just need the time to enjoy a good old fashioned snow day with the need to follow the school calendar as much as we can. And, most often, it may be a matter of timing of when the snow events occur. For example, we will probably use a FID on Tuesday because our students already have tomorrow off. We can also remember that FID's do have flexibility that can be utilized so that families do have a chance to enjoy the snow. But, as mentioned, it's possible that we just need to take the day and enjoy when weather impacts our school days.

What is Flexible Instruction Day?

The history.....A few years ago, the PA Department of Education (PDE) developed guidelines for school districts that wanted to provide instruction during school closures, particularly for snow days, so that schools did not have to make up the days later in the school year. PDE developed an extensive application process for districts to show that teaching/learning would happen during closures. PDE called these days "Flexible Instructional Days (FIDs)," and any district could complete and submit the application to PDE for approval prior to the school year beginning. Relatively few districts applied at that time because online

learning was not in place in most districts. With the pandemic and the rapid switch to online learning, many districts, including Bellefonte, completed and submitted the application this year.

Our application for FIDs was submitted and approved by PDE in September. The approval allows us to implement our FIDs plan during school closures, again, primarily for weather-related reasons. According to the rules, we are approved to take up to 5 FID's for this school year and each of the next two school years. However, while the Governor's emergency declaration for the pandemic is in place, we could take Emergency Instructional Days for any closures, too.

In short, FID's are used mainly for weather-related or other emergencies so that days do not need to be made up later in the school year. Flexible Instructional Days will most likely involve all of the students in the district or at the minimum, a whole school.

But, what is a Remote Learning Day?

The history.....Remote Learning Days evolved out of the pandemic when schools were closed, but were still required to provide 180 days of education by PDE. In order to show that districts are providing an education during pandemic or other closures, districts are required to complete and submit an "Emergency Instructional Template" to PDE. This was an expansion of the mandatory PDE Continuity of Education plans from last spring. Our Emergency Instructional Plan Template also is attached to our PDE-required ,Health and Safety Plan (available on the BASD website). According to this plan, we must provide remote instruction to students if our schools are closed, but particularly if the schools are closed due to the coronavirus. On November 23, 2020, PDE announced that in order to be open for any in-person learning, districts must sign an Attestation form which includes mandates for districts to close to in-person instruction and move to remote learning days if the number of active coronavirus cases reaches certain thresholds over a 14 day, rolling calendar period. So, if our schools are or must close due to coronavirus cases, we must use Remote Learning days.

What does a Remote Learning Day look like? For the most part, teachers will be teaching from their classrooms, and students will follow their normal school schedule to connect to the class in real time and access the lessons through Google Classroom. We've also used this approach for students who needed to quarantine and will continue to do so.

In short, Remote Learning Days are used during the pandemic to provide students with 180 days of education, and could involve individual students, groups of students, classes of students or building of students or students in the entire district.

Aren't Remote Learning Days and FID's really the same?

In some ways, yes. But the biggest difference is how teaching/learning actually occur on the days when schools are not open. While Google Classroom is the platform that will be used, and students should login to their Google Classroom on both Remote Learning Days and FID's,

the difference is when should this occur. There are two types of online learning - Synchronous and Asynchronous.

Our Remote Learning Days are intended to be as “synchronous” as possible. Synchronous means that teaching and learning should occur “live.” Teachers will use Google Classroom and Google Meets to provide the live lessons, and students are expected to logon and engage while the class is happening, if possible.

According to the approved application, FID’s may have “synchronous” and/or “asynchronous” teaching and learning. Synchronous teaching/learning is described at the end of the next section. Asynchronous can occur at any time. Teachers are expected to load lessons or activities into Google Classroom, and students are expected to login at any time of the day to complete the activities, if possible. Teachers will contact students through Google Classroom to let them know what they need to do on a FID.

How will we know if it’s a Remote Learning Day or a Flexible Instructional Day?

For now, we have both options available to us. Usually, we will have Remote Learning Days if the closure is related to the coronavirus or pandemic. We will announce that we are moving to **Remote Learning Days** through the call and email system, as we did in December.

And, usually, we will have a Flexible Instructional Day when we have a weather-related or other emergency closure. When we make the mass call or email, we will say that we are using a **Flexible Instructional Day** due to potential or pending poor weather conditions (or other emergency). Of course, if we were to have an **old-fashioned snow day**, we will make that announcement as such, too.

Summary

I know this is a lot of information and may be very confusing. The attached chart is a summary of this information that may be more concise than all of this.

I don’t know what the weather will hold for tomorrow night into Tuesday, yet, but I’m sure I’ll be gathering information, chatting with others about it, and weighing our options. If we have to alter our schedule or plans for Tuesday, I’ll surely try to give you as much notice as possible.

I’ll send my usual update letter either later tomorrow or very early on Tuesday, too. I hope you and your family have a marvelous Monday!

Sincerely,
Tammie Burnaford
Interim Superintendent
Bellefonte Area School District