

Canastota Central School District

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District Office

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Dear Canastota School Community,

The world looks very different from what it looked like this time last year. Schools from around the country have certainly not been immune to the chaos, and have had to change the way they operated from previous years. This year, the State Education Department has allowed districts to participate in a pilot initiative that allows schools to get credit for an instructional day on what would have previously been a snow day. In order to make an informed decision regarding how Canastota would approach this issue, the district issued a survey a few weeks ago that allowed us to gather feedback from the school community. We received 693 total responses to the survey from staff and community members. Based upon the survey results, and the requirements the state has imposed regarding mandatory days of attendance each academic year, it makes sense for Canastota Central School District to incorporate remote instruction as an option for the 2020-21 school year. Reasons why we considered participation in the pilot include the following:

- School districts in New York are required to be in session a minimum of 180 days/year. If schools use more snow days than the amount allotted, they must convert a day/days previously designated as a vacation day to an instructional day to reach their 180 day requirement. Often, this means days during the Spring Break week. Having the ability to use a remote day would allow us to avoid having to disrupt previously scheduled vacations, Spring break would remain intact, and families can make plans accordingly.
- One of the lessons we learned from the COVID-19 pandemic is that districts can conduct instruction remotely. School districts are often frustrated that they are not able to make decisions about how to educate students at the local level. Since this pilot opportunity is available to us, it makes sense that we use remote learning on emergency closure days. This allows us to exercise more control over our school calendar.
- Even though the district could have students positively engaged in learning remotely on a snow day, it does not mean kids would have to be on the computer the entire day. Direct engagement on the computer would not be expected all day long; a modified instructional schedule would allow kids to continue to learn, allow the school to get credit for a day of attendance, and students could still have the flexibility in learning to engage in activity other than staring at a computer screen. Each building will distribute their modified remote snow day schedule in the coming days.
- In years where districts did not have to use all of their snow days, they could “give back” a day toward the end of the year. Students and adults often look forward to the prospect of having an extended weekend that they can plan in advance, especially when it is late in the year when the weather is much nicer.

- In the survey recently offered to families of the district, 59% of respondents preferred snow days to remain traditional snow days with no instruction occurring, while 41% would like to see instruction occur on those days. Implementing a modified remote format allows us to create a schedule that finds a balance of those two positions, especially since the survey did not yield an overwhelming majority for either position.

After careful consideration of all of these relevant points, the district's plan for snow days for the remainder of the 2020-21 school year is as follows:

- 1. The first two emergency closure "snow days" will be treated as traditional snow days – no instruction will occur. These days, in every way, will look like a traditional snow day.**
- 2. Beginning with the 3rd snow day, remote instruction will occur utilizing a specific, modified remote schedule for each building. Teachers will be allowed to instruct from home. Again, this modified schedule will be communicated from each building principal.**
- 3. Friday, May 28th, right before Memorial Day weekend, is now a vacation day. Since we know we can avoid overuse of emergency closure days, we can confirm that this will be a vacation day much sooner than we could in previous years.**

Once again, I'd like to thank all of you for your participation in our recent survey. I anticipate that this "hybrid" snow day model will allow our students (and staff) to still experience the thrill of an occasional snow day, but also allows us to gain experience in operating under a remote instructional model when necessary. Please remember that this is a pilot initiative, and we will continue to evaluate the effectiveness of this schedule as we progress through the year. Therefore, this schedule is only in effect for the 2020-21 school year. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

Shawn D. Bisetta
Superintendent of Schools

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