

Joshua R. Meyer *Superintendent of Schools*

February 2nd, 2021

Boquet Valley CSD Families:

In September, 2020, the New York State Education Department announced a pilot program (Memo attached below) that provides school district flexibility in a “snow emergency”.

*As part of the Department’s ongoing efforts to provide districts with flexibility in meeting local needs during the pandemic, the Department is establishing a one-year pilot to enable school districts, at district option, and consistent with each district’s re-opening educational plan, **to pivot to remote instruction to provide continuity of instruction on what would otherwise be a day of school closure due to a snow emergency.** This pilot is in effect for the 2020-21 school year, after which the Department will review the outcome of the pilot in determining whether to continue this flexibility in subsequent school years.*

This was discussed at our October Regular Board of Education Meeting and sent to employees and home to families in the subsequent weeks. During several of my follow-up conversations, it became clear to me that there are some misconceptions about how emergency days typically work. I would like to take a moment to address those misconceptions in an effort to demonstrate why the use of a remote instruction day in place of a school closure could be a useful tool in future school years.

School districts typically set their calendar for the following year in the spring. This usually includes anywhere from two to six emergency days built into the calendar. Boquet Valley planned for 5 emergency days this year. If we use five or fewer emergency days, then there is no issue. We subtract those days from the list of “Potential Unused Emergency Days” on the school calendar. If we were forced to use a 6th emergency day, then we have a problem. We need to take this day away from one of the planned recess periods. This would likely happen in April, which is the week that many of our faculty, staff, and families plan to take a vacation of some kind. This becomes very difficult for our employees and families to adjust their plans with very little notice.

As you are aware, living in the North Country, we have had the rogue storm in late April or early May. This would present a huge problem for the district, as we have no more planned recess periods to pull from. We are left with two choices:

- 1) to extend the school year by one day (which sometimes isn’t possible to do before June 30th and thus makes it impossible for contractual reasons.) or
- 2) to forgo 1/180th of our state aid for the year (about \$41,000-which is a huge amount of money for our district).

These are all very real scenarios that I have experienced earlier in my career (as a teacher), and that local districts have experienced very recently. While we can hope for the best when it comes to the weather, I would feel much more comfortable to have this remote learning option in place as a tool if we need to or want to use it. In order to adequately provide feedback to the State, we had to participate in the pilot program, which now, we have done.

Emergency days are used for a variety of reasons, not just snow. If you recall, we closed on November 1st, 2019 due to flooding. Districts in our region have closed when their heat wasn’t working, for gas leaks, for transportation issues, and for a variety of other reasons.

Another benefit of this option, is the ability to provide ample notice. A typical emergency provides parents and families with 1-2 hours of notice. This model provides 20-24 hours of notice.

While I understand that remote learning is difficult for everyone, please consider that we are very hopeful that in future years, the amount of remote learning will be significantly less than it was during 2020-21.



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Joshua R. Meyer *Superintendent of Schools*

Lastly, I want to assure you, that I enjoy a good “snow day” as much as anyone. Watching my children play in the snow for hours is fantastic. Historically the emergency days in our region have been used for ice just as often as for snow. My point being, that on some of these emergency days, our students are not outside playing in the snow.

With that, my opinion is that the use of remote learning days in place of emergency days is a good option for our District to have. As the Superintendent, I can tell you that I would not abuse this option, but rather use it if we needed it, or if there was a compelling reason.

Please use [this link](#) to take a survey about the remote instruction day that was used on February 2nd, 2020 or copy and paste this link into your browser:

https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLScGPefQvSWDdO95HFWM-9fkK8yvrsCFblw4xnCdu-X6w8ZPWA/viewform?usp=sf_link

I look forward to receiving your feedback.



THE STATE EDUCATION DEPARTMENT / THE UNIVERSITY OF THE STATE OF NEW YORK / ALBANY, NY 12234

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September 2020

TO: School District Superintendents
School District State Aid Designees
BOCES District Superintendents
School Building Leaders
Charter School Leaders

FROM: Brian S. Cechnicki, Director of Education Finance 

RE: 2020-21 School Year COVID-19 Snow Day Pilot Program

As part of the Department’s ongoing efforts to provide districts with flexibility in meeting local needs during the pandemic, the Department is establishing a one-year pilot to enable school districts, at district option, and consistent with each district’s re-opening educational plan, to pivot to remote instruction to provide continuity of instruction on what would otherwise be a day of school closure due to a snow emergency. This pilot is in effect for the 2020-21 school year, after which the Department will review the outcome of the pilot in determining whether to continue this flexibility in subsequent school years.

Sincerely,



Joshua R. Meyer
Superintendent