



Melrose Public Schools Administrative Offices

360 LYNN FELLS PARKWAY, MELROSE, MA 02176

TELEPHONE: (781) 662-2000 V/TTY
FAX: (781) 979-2149

CYNDY S. TAYMORE
Superintendent of Schools
Email: ctaymore@melroseschools.com

MARIANNE FARRELL
Director of Finance and Administrative Affairs
Email: mfarrell@melroseschools.com

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Dear Families,

On Tuesday, January 23, 2018, the Melrose School Committee approved a short term pilot for a School Cancellation Project, also sometimes known as “blizzard bags.” Approved by the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education as an Alternative Structured Learning Day Program, this pilot will provide us with an opportunity to assess the use of distance learning under specific circumstances and provide important feedback on what succeeds and how to improve the experience and outcomes for students. Alternative Structured Learning Day Programs can only be used for school days cancelled due to weather conditions.

The Melrose Public Schools has been actively pursuing innovative approaches to teaching and learning for five years. We are developing an individualized yet collaborative approach to learning K-12 that provides students with quality instruction that is aligned with the standards yet also offers a range of opportunities so that we meet students’ individual interests and abilities through differentiated and inclusive instruction, online learning, blended learning, extended learning opportunities, and learning outside of the classroom through internships, foreign exchanges, independent study, and dual enrollment. The “School Cancellation Project” builds on the instructional practices, assessments, and standard based competencies that we are developing as we expand personalized learning throughout the system. The feedback gathered from this pilot will help to inform the district’s plans and next steps as education as a whole becomes less about “seat time” and more about our students’ ability to learn anywhere at any time and how we measure their success in doing so.

The plan provides for the following:

1. Advanced notification to parents and students of the protocols and assignments for cancelled school days.
2. Assignments tied to the appropriate grade level standards and content so that they clearly advance current learning. Our goal is provide relevant and authentic learning opportunities in place of canceled school days.
3. Teachers will be working from home during the day and monitoring communication throughout the school day. However, for the purpose of consistency and predictability, they will respond to emails and other communications for 2 hours during this day. Teachers will post their “office hours” for snow days on their website or Aspen pages. The times do not have to be consecutive and may spread over the hours of a typical school schedule.
4. Since we have already had two snow days, the pilot would only be in effect for the last three snow days. If we have two consecutive days, the snow cancellation project will only apply to one of the days. The pilot will not extend beyond April 1, 2018.
5. If we have multiple consecutive days off, special education teachers and specialists will determine if students receiving services experienced substantial regression and if necessary, arrange for extra services to remediate the regression.
6. All staff, including educators, paraprofessionals, and other support personnel have assigned roles and responsibilities for the day.
7. A review process during the pilot in which administrators will first preview assignments for quality and alignment and then again after a cancelled date to assess the student completion and the quality of the outcomes. We will have staff actively track data: 1.) how many students completed assignments while at home; 2.) how many students needed in school time upon return to complete assignments;) how many students contacted teachers via email,

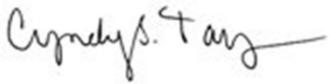
Facebook, Twitter, Google, or other applications during the snow day for help/guidance; 4.) how many students had access problems during the snow day.

8. Guidelines to ensure equity and to account for the unexpected (i.e., loss of electricity) are included in the plan.
9. A review of the pilot after it is completed. We will survey parents at the end of the pilot to obtain their feedback on the success or weaknesses of the program. In addition, we will conduct focus groups with groups of students to assess what worked, what didn't work, and if they felt the assignments were helpful.

Lastly, we all prefer to have students interacting in person with highly qualified educators and engaged in mutual learning with other students. We never make the decision to cancel school easily and consult with both city officials and other school districts. That will not change with this project. However, we have to be honest about the quality of instruction that takes place as we go later into June. We believe that offering students extended learning opportunities over the winter that are relevant to current units of study and have clear expectations for outcomes will be a better quality than what may occur in late June. Moreover, 21st century students will most likely engage in some degree of online and/or blended learning in college and many will eventually work in a "distance" environment from home, satellite offices, or while traveling. Similar to the work we are doing in our schools, extended learning opportunities help students acquire the necessary personal skills and work habits required in both their current and future academic and work environments.

As part of our design for the new Melrose Public Schools website, we included a page for the School Cancellation Pilot (<http://www.melroseschools.com/district-home/school-cancellation-project>). Information regarding the pilot is posted to the website. It includes background information on roles and responsibilities, a "FAQ" for families, and links by school to each teacher's personal website information, including snow cancellation assignments and office hours. If you have any questions regarding your child's assignment, I encourage you to contact first the teacher, and, if necessary, your child's principal.

Sincerely,



Cyndy S. Taymore
Superintendent of Schools

Attachments: Snow Cancellation Pilot Program Roles and Responsibilities
Snow Cancellation Pilot FAQ