

Continuing learning during snow days

Tri-City United Independent School District

Montgomery, Minnesota

With an average of 36 to 70 inches of snowfall annually, Minnesota students have seen their fair share of snow days. While a joy to many, snow days can lead to end-of-year make-up days required to meet the state-specified days for learning, which subsequently eat into not only the students' time off over the summer but also into the district resource budget. To combat this, Tri-City United Independent School District (Tri-City United), which as of mid-March has already experienced six snow days during the winter of 2018–19, developed a district-wide blended learning plan to provide opportunities for students to continue their learning during snow days.

Tri-City United is a 1-to-1 district located in South Central Minnesota with approximately 1,925 students, a K-8 school located in each of their three communities, and one shared high school. Matt Flugum, the Teaching and Learning Facilitator, shares, “Four years ago Tri-City United began focusing on empowering learners through purposeful digital learning tools and techniques including teacher professional development and summer personalized professional development projects. This has enabled flexibility as students and teachers are able to transition to learning with technology during snow days.”

During winter of 2017–18, Tri-City United held discussions with district personnel and the Teachers Union about the blended learning plan, and out of that discussion, a shared vision of what e-learning would look like was born. Superintendent Dr. Teri Preisler says the district began communicating with students and parents in spring 2018 about the blended learning plan that would be used for snow days. In summer and fall 2018, newsletters were sent out and shared during parent-teacher conferences as a reminder. The blended learning plan included a “practice blended learning day” at school in November.

The blended learning day starts with an automated phone call announcing the snow day. The day itself is set up mostly asynchronously with the exception of when a student wants to reach out to a teacher and/or fellow students to get help. For middle and high school students, the teachers post lessons by 10 a.m. on the learning platform. Students log in and navigate through the resources. Elementary school students are provided learning resources digitally in addition to physical packets, which are sent home in advance of the snow season to be used for snow days. Work assigned on a snow day follows the same requirements as any lesson assigned (due dates, quality of work completed, etc.). To address equity and access, families without Internet or reliable Internet communicated with school personnel and were supported through a collaboration with T-Mobile for community area “hot spots.”

Preisler reflected on lessons learned from the feedback they received from teachers, parents, and students so far. Their first experience with a real snow day included four snow days in a row, so they are working on having more resources in place for next year. They also discovered that the communication plan was overwhelming to parents, so they consolidated their messages together with clear subject lines. The program has already saved days from being added to the end of the school year.

This profile was developed through correspondence with Teri Preisler and Matt Flugum of Tri-City United Independent School District and with the help of resources and information from a news article published in the *Lonsdale News Review*.