



PAULDING COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT

Ensuring a bright future for every child

CLIFF COLE
Superintendent

January 14, 2011

Dear Paulding Families, Students, and Staff,

As you are aware the recent weather events have caused disruption to our regular school calendar. As a result of the inclement weather days, students have missed six full days of instructional time. The missed days were December 16, 2010, and January 10-14, 2011.

In order to address this loss of instructional time, I recommended and the Paulding County Board of Education approved a revised school calendar for the remainder of the 2010-2011 school year. The revised calendar adds the following dates as student attendance days: Monday-Friday, February 21-25, 2011 and Friday, March 11, 2011.

The primary consideration in approving the revised school calendar was the need to restore quality instructional time as soon as possible. As we move into the second semester, students will be required to demonstrate mastery of course and/or grade level standards for high-stakes decisions such as awarding of credit, program qualification, and in some cases for graduation from high school or promotion to the next grade level. Depending upon grade level and program enrollment, students may be participating in the Georgia Writing Assessment, Criterion Referenced Competency Tests, Georgia High School Graduation Tests, Advanced Placement Exams, and several other standardized assessments as a means of demonstrating mastery. We want to afford our students every opportunity for quality instruction, and to provide the instructional opportunities prior to any course or grade level performance requirements or assessments.

In considering the make-up options, several questions have been presented.

1. ***Did the district's originally approved calendar include any provision for inclement weather days?***

Each year, the state allows districts to build into their calendars four days that may be used should emergencies arise. For this year only because of the current fiscal crisis, the state has allowed districts unprecedented flexibility to utilize those built-in emergency days as "unpaid leave" days. Paulding's originally approved 2010-2011 calendar took advantage of the state-allowed flexibility and shortened the calendar by four instructional days (from 180 days to 176 days) thus leaving no provision for built-in inclement weather days. The abbreviated calendar was a critical component to the district's ability to address the financial shortfall and provide a balanced budget.

2. ***Might the state consider waiving the missed instructional time requirement?*** While there has been discussion of a waiver, there is no certainty if or when this may be approved as an alternative for making up missed instructional time. Regardless, a waiver would not recoup lost instructional time nor ensure our students have maximum opportunity to master the curriculum.

3. ***Were other options considered?***

Several alternate make-up plans were considered in formulating a recommendation to the Board of Education. First, the possibility of extending the school day by a certain number of minutes per day was considered. However, given the number of days, that plan would have resulted in a significant lengthening of each school day. With the approved revision of the school calendar, lengthening of the school day will still be an option should we be faced with more missed days.

Second, consideration was given to recouping the instructional time during other student holidays. Discussion centered around which student holidays would be least disruptive to family plans and provide students with the best opportunity to recoup the instructional time. In considering Spring Break, it was discussed that more families tend to plan events over that break. Also, the instructional time provided through Spring Break attendance would occur after some of the high-stakes assessments in which students participate.

Finally, consideration was given to adding the days onto the end of the school year. This option did not provide for recouped instruction prior to critical testing. Additional concerns included the many graduation plans and activities that would be impacted by a later end date. In looking at the calendar, some of the additional days would fall after Memorial Day, so students would have to attend classes over a two week period. This would mean two weeks of disruption which was more likely to impact more families who may have summer activities planned including those surrounding family celebrations for our graduating seniors. Ultimately, the discussion came back to the fact that any plan for making up days would impact a number of families and staff whose plans would be disrupted.

4. ***Why was there no window for community input on this decision?***

In discussions with the board members, there was quite a bit of consideration as to how to allow for public input on the plan. However, as discussion continued regarding the advantages and disadvantages for each plan presented, the members felt that time was of the essence in communicating any changes to the public. Therefore, it was determined that the revised calendar (as approved) was the best option to address an unfortunate situation and that a timely vote would better allow families and staff to plan.

5. ***What happens for families who have trips and activities planned during these days?***

Be assured that your local school administrators and staff will work with families to address individual situations and circumstances associated with the revised calendar.

It is the goal of the Paulding County School District to provide the best possible educational opportunities for our students – even when inclement weather days and other unforeseen circumstances occur. We are sensitive to the fact that many of our students, families, and staff have vacations, trips, and activities planned for these days, and we deeply regret the disruption to family plans the revised calendar will cause. Again, we will work with families and staff to address individual concerns.

We thank you for your support and look forward to a successful continuation of the 2010-2011 school year.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Cliff Cole". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "C" and a long, sweeping underline.

Cliff Cole
Superintendent