



Twin Valley School District

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Twin Valley School District
“Every Student, Every Day”

March 29, 2020

Twin Valley parents, students and community,

As current school board president and spokesperson for the board I am sending this letter on behalf of the Twin Valley School Board. The administration and the school board have spent countless hours sharing communications and ongoing conversations with each other, state officials, other school districts, Intermediate Units, teachers’ association leadership, support services leadership, principals, special education attorneys, and the school district solicitor to gather information and make decisions. Each school board member has been in direct communication with administration asking probing questions and requesting additional information in order to make the decisions we have for the district.

We would like to express our appreciation for everyone’s patience and support as we navigate this serious crisis that none of us have ever before experienced in our lifetime. We need to all remember to keep things in perspective as we continue to encounter additional hardships as a result of this pandemic. Know that the school board and administration are working together to make the best decisions based on the current facts for the short-term and long-term issues that will confront the district.

The following information and timeline may help everyone understand the reasons for the decisions that we have made to date. There are many components and logistics for the decisions that are made. The district administration and school board are committed to making decisions that are in the best interests of our students, staff, and community now and in the future. It is easy to develop an inaccurate understanding when there is so much misinformation, rumors and perceptions of what others are doing that are incorrect and based on limited information.

The following is a chronological explanation of the facts that Twin Valley administration and school board have used for the decision-making process to date:

Friday, March 13, 2020 – Governor Wolf directed all PA schools to close for 10 business days effective Monday, March 16, 2020

- Twin Valley administration prepared and provided packets for K-4 students to take home and provided a comprehensive list of engagement/enrichment links to provide all K-12 students with the opportunity to use on March 16, 2020. In collaboration with the teachers, the administration has continued to add resources for the students.
- During this ten-day closure, teachers were given the opportunity to work five days remotely from home on professional development activities. For example, developing their content for Schoology courses and working on curriculum development.
- Teachers receive an annual salary paid out over 12 months for working 190 days; 182 days of the 190 are for working with students. We all know remote/enrichment activities-do not provide the same service for all students due to connectivity issues, home environments and various skill level and motivation of students.
- Each day that teachers are involved in providing some type of review and Direct enrichment activity directed by the administration counts as a teacher workday and reduces the number of days available for student/classroom days.

On March 17, 2020 the Twin Valley administration started ‘grab and go’ food distribution daily.

- As an added convenience and to reduce logistic issues for families trying to pick up daily, the district began to provide a week’s worth of food every Tuesday at three locations.

March 23, 2020 – Governor Wolf extended the school closure until April 9, 2020

- Due to the new closure date and in anticipation that online instruction will be inevitable, Twin Valley administration distributed a technology survey to determine families that do not have the equipment or access to internet connection so that every student could be included in the online learning process.
- Twin Valley administration received 1,500 responses (3,074 students are enrolled at Twin Valley) and started to contact the families that didn’t respond to the survey.

March 25, 2020 – PA legislature approved HB 751

Thursday, March 26, 2020 – Governor signed HB 751

HB 751 officially waived the 180-day mandatory school year (It is important to point out that at this time, the Pennsylvania Department of Education will not penalize schools who cannot make up these days missed). There is, however, still a recommendation that districts work to adjust their school calendar to meet the 180-day requirement and the learning needs of their students that have been interrupted during this period of time. It is still our belief that the best place to educate students is in the classroom and we hope that time will come again in April or May.

That is why we are looking to the possibility of adding days to the calendar in June to ensure we end the school year on a high note and with the highest standards possible. If a calendar change is proposed it must be voted on at a public meeting. We have already made a financial investment in educating our students for 180 days and want to take full advantage of the time we have together. We recognize that if a change is approved, it will pose a challenge for some families and we will make accommodations for them. Please reach out to your building principal for further instructions if a calendar change is proposed and approved.

- Waiving the 180 days provides flexibility to shorten the number of student instructional days in the year which as educators' is never something we want to do to our students.
- The bill encouraged districts to prepare and proceed with a plan to provide Continuity of Education.
 - The Continuity of Education plan could be to provide Enrichment Opportunities (Twin Valley provided the enrichment opportunities from the 1st day of the closure, including many of the same online programs that student's use on a daily basis (RazKids, ebooks, CPM activities, etc.)
 - or Planned Instruction
- The bill does not waive any relief from F.A.P.E requirements. F.A.P.E stands for Free Appropriate Public Education, which means equal education must be provided to all students with IEPs, regardless of their disability.
- Providing F.A.P.E is the law and can result in due process hearings
 - It is a potential financial liability if the district is required to provide payments for compensatory damages.
 - One of the responsibilities of the administration and school board is to be good stewards of the taxpayers' money as well as provide quality education for our students.

March 26, 2020

- School Board, Administration and the District Solicitor held a virtual executive session to discuss the legal ramifications of moving forward with online instruction as it relates to F.A.P.E.
 - Executive session meetings must comply with the Sunshine Law requirements and are closed to the public. All board members have the opportunity to ask questions and share opinions, so the administration has guidance to move forward.

- Based on the technology survey the administration is anticipating a rollout over several days to provide all students with equipment and internet access to those students who do not currently have it.

March 27, 2020

- As a result of the constant communication and the approval of HB 751 our special education attorney's firm developed a waiver form to help mitigate any F.A.P.E. issues by Twin Valley transitioning to online instruction for all students.
- The TV administration sent information providing a date when an effective, comprehensive online learning program could commence.

Sunday, March 29, 2020

- School Board and Administration held another executive session to review the forms received from the special education attorney on March 27 to address F.A.P.E for the purpose of understanding the level of risk as the district moves forward.
- Based on this information and the teachers' confidence that they are prepared and ready to provide quality online instruction for all students, we have reconsidered the decision and will begin online instruction on or before April 6, 2020 for students. The Twin Valley District Administration will send information on Monday March 30, 2020 outlining the details.

I hope we can continue to work together to navigate these challenging times in a manner that will make us all proud to be part of the Twin Valley School District community. As parents, guardians, grandparents, friends and neighbors together we need to focus on the facts, act as role models and keep our attention and focus on what is best for our students.

On behalf of the Twin Valley School Board

Sincerely,

Gary McEwen