

Further information on Instruction During School Closures

1) The Pennsylvania Department of Education is not requiring school districts to provide new instruction while schools are closed due to coronavirus.

2) Is our District prepared to offer an alternative, flexible delivery format for instruction?

Yes. The District's decision to not move forward with flexible learning at this time has nothing to do with our readiness or willingness to provide "new" instruction.

3) Why isn't our district currently offering new instruction at this time?

Our district legal counsel has advised us that providing new instruction would be a legal, as we do not yet have a way of providing flexible online options for students with significant disabilities; as well as a financial risk as teachers would be paid during this closure but still be required to work additional days until June 30th as is currently required.

- If districts strive to provide continuity of education, they legally have to make sure that they are meeting the legal obligations to students with special needs – something much harder to do under these circumstances.
- All of the out-of-school placement locations for our special education students are also closed at this time.
- If we were to provide new instruction now, we would not be able to provide it for all students. We would have some students logging instructional days, while others would not be able to do so.
- Neither the state or PDE has confirmed that schools will not be required to remain in session until June 30th.

4) If the Pennsylvania Department of Education decides to extend the school year in June to make up missed days, it would lead to enormous additional costs for the district if we also provide e-learning in the short term.

- This is because providing instruction during school closures would involve teachers working. If we also need to provide instruction beyond the end of the school year, we would also need to compensate teachers for that extra time. That would be a large, unbudgeted expenditure that would be difficult to cover.
- We are working hard to maintain the financial resources of the district during this difficult time.

5) Only three school districts in Delaware County are attempting online learning during the current school closure period, which lasts until March 27.

- From speaking with other superintendents, we understand that some districts sent out communication to families last Friday informing them that e-learning would take place. They did not feel they could pull back from this plan once those messages went out.
- In making that decision, districts are assuming some legal risk.
- It is looking like we will be out of school beyond March 27 across the state. It remains to be seen if the three districts currently providing e-learning will continue to do so after March 27.
- All other districts in our area are doing what we are: offering optional educational activities and resources for families to take part in during the school closures.
- Some of these districts have now pulled back their “new” learning and others are following. Other districts across PA are doing the same thing having reconsidered the risk and received further guidance and counsel. RTMSD has been prudent in its decision making and in following guidance and legal counsel. ALL districts, including RTMSD, are trying to do the right thing for ALL of our students as we all work on navigating through this uncharted territory.

5) If the school year does get extended in June, we would be able to use flexible learning and delivery options at that time.

- In that scenario, the risks to the school district would be reduced or eliminated. We could provide e-learning opportunities if we were required to keep school in session until June 30th and we could offer in-school sessions for those students who would not be able to access any of the flexible learning options.

6) For the time being, we are doing our best to provide students with educational opportunities while schools are closed—even though they are optional. Our teachers and staff are clamoring to do so and want to be providing education to our students.

- We have posted optional activities and educational resources students can use to reinforce and practice skills. They are available at <https://www.rtmsd.org/Content2/2392>.
- We strongly encourage all families to have their children engage in these activities over the next several weeks. This will help ensure learning continues to take place, even though assignments will not be graded.

7) What if the school closure is extended?

We have reached out to the Governor’s Office, the US and PA Departments of Education, and the state legislators to provide us with the necessary decisions and waivers needed so that we can move forward with offering new instruction using alternative, flexible formats. In the event of an extended closure, we anticipate moving forward with providing new instruction with the assumption that by March

30th, state governmental entities will have addressed the issues that are currently standing in the way of us providing new instruction.

This is not a situation specific to Rose Tree Media School District. ALL students across the nation are being impacted by COVID-19. The most important priority right now is to make sure that we are doing what we have to do to stay healthy and to be careful to not put those in our community who are more vulnerable to this illness at greater risk. We want students to be intellectually engaged, reading, and learning and have provided the resources for them to do so. We all believe that learning certainly can and does occur outside of formal instruction and assigned work.