

In December 2024, Lakeside High School in Ashtabula County experienced a partial roof collapse due to approximately 5.5 feet of snow accumulation. The heavy snowfall caused the roof to lift and separate from the building, rendering the structure unsafe for occupancy.

In response to the collapse, the administrative team immediately began working on a plan to bring our students back to in-person learning as quickly as possible. This team developed a plan to allow all our high school students to return to the classroom immediately following winter break. Lakeside High School has a student population of almost 850 students and is the largest building in the county.

The plan called for the district to relocate students to various temporary sites, including a former primary school and a former Catholic school. While this required significant adjustments and changes district-wide, it allowed the high school students to return to school while repairs were underway.

Because the building was deemed unsafe for occupancy, we could not get any of the teachers' materials out of their rooms. At that time, we had lost all instructional materials, supplies, furniture, etc. The district immediately began ordering all necessary supplies and preparing these buildings for occupancy by high school students.

Simultaneously, our teachers immediately transitioned to remote learning in order to maintain a continuum of education and provide support and encouragement to our students. However, as we are all keenly aware, this structure is not in the best interest of the students.

Since the COVID-19 pandemic, the debate between in-person and online learning has been widely analyzed. Research consistently shows that in-person learning provides significant academic, social, and emotional benefits that cannot be fully replicated in an online setting.

Some of the key differences include:

- **Lower Academic Performance** – Research from the National Bureau of Economic Research (NBER) found that students in remote or hybrid learning environments during the pandemic had significantly lower proficiency scores in math and reading compared to those attending in-person instruction.
- **Decreased Engagement & Retention** – The American Educational Research Association found that students in virtual settings struggle more with maintaining focus, leading to decreased retention of material. Without direct teacher interaction, students are more likely to disengage and fall behind academically.
- **Widening of Achievement Gaps** – Online learning disproportionately affects students from disadvantaged backgrounds. Many lack access to stable internet, quiet study spaces, or parental support, further exacerbating educational inequities. The Brookings Institution reported that low-income students experienced some of the highest learning losses in remote settings.
- **Limited Social and Emotional Development** – Beyond academics, in-person learning fosters critical social interactions, teamwork, and emotional growth. Students develop essential communication and interpersonal skills that are difficult to replicate in virtual environments.

Given what we knew, in-person learning was paramount in our decision-making process. We wanted our students to have the benefits of physically being in school, such as:

- **Direct Teacher Support** – Immediate feedback and hands-on instruction help students grasp difficult concepts faster.
- **Structured Learning Environments** – A routine schedule with minimal distractions supports student engagement and accountability.
- **Social Connections & Mental Health Benefits** – School provides a safe space for students to interact, build relationships, and receive emotional and psychological support from teachers and peers.

While online learning can serve as a temporary solution in emergencies, it should not replace the structure and benefits that traditional schooling provides.

We immediately realized that we had to prioritize safe, in-person education to prevent further learning loss and ensure the best outcomes for our students.

In addition to the difficulties, the district was without internet and phones for over a month because our server was located in the high school. Once the team could access that part of the building, the entire server room had to be dismantled, relocated, repaired, and reassembled at a different location. This outage and process began during the three-day period from December 18th to the 20th.

In order to facilitate the return to in-person learning, the staff had to set up brand new classrooms, the master schedule had to be redone, transportation had to develop new bus routes, and we had to adjust the school day's start and end times for students and staff, just to list a few issues.

It was like starting another new school year, but much more complex.

My staff worked tirelessly to prepare to welcome students back to the classroom in an environment that was as closely replicated to what they had prior to their displacement.

These were not calamity days. The students did not report on these days, but the staff was provided time to complete this daunting mountain of tasks.

I want to reiterate and clarify that there was no internet during this time because we had no server, making it impossible to continue with online learning.

These additional 3 waiver days are essential for us. I believe that if you were to look at what we were able to accomplish in such a short time, our

action plan could be used as a model for other future emergencies. These are not typical “calamity days” we are asking for.

Again, our number one goal was to maintain educational continuity.

This is why we ask that you consider our request for additional calamity days be granted. Given the magnitude of this transition, additional days were necessary to:

- **Ensure a Properly Structured Learning Environment** – Granting these days will allow the district to complete the necessary adjustments to provide a stable and effective learning environment for students.
- **Minimize Learning Loss** – Research supports the need for structured, in-person learning to prevent educational setbacks. Additional calamity days will help ensure that students receive the instructional time needed for success.
- **Support Student and Teacher Adaptation** – These extra days will provide both students and staff the necessary time to adjust to the new locations, establish routines, and resume high-quality instruction.

In addition, our District is facing a necessary \$1.7 million budget cut, and the cost of extending the school year for these three days would be a significant burden to the district, costing about \$400,000.

It would also cause an undue burden to the students, staff, and community during a time that has already been quite arduous for many.

Adding days to the academic calendar is not as simple as it may sound. For example, it would force adjustments to summer academic services, extended school year services, and our after-school, Summer Discovery Programs, and graduation.

It feels like these students have been through enough; they lived through COVID-19 and are now living through displacement from their beloved school.

The challenges posed by their displacement cannot be ignored, and the use of these 3 days allowed the district to prioritize in-person learning, minimize disruption, and ensure that students receive the academic and emotional support needed to succeed.

From a leadership position, I understand the concern regarding precedent-setting decisions. However, this is a rare and unique situation that, hopefully, we never see again in Ohio.

I appreciate being given the time to speak with you today and explain the unprecedented situation we were faced with. This natural disaster could not have been foreseen. We hope you will grant us these additional days and allow us to continue putting the well-being of our students and community as our top priority.

Thank you again for your time and consideration.

Extra Information

Furniture had to be unboxed, put together, and moved to the correct classrooms. New instructional materials had to be sorted, organized and recorded before being distributed. It was like the first day of school all over again, but significantly more involved. Schedules had to be rewritten. Some teachers had to be reassigned to teach different classes. The master schedule had to be completely reworked. As did the transportation schedule, the beginning and end times for students and staff, as well as arrival and dismissal procedures. New duty schedules had to be created and assigned. New class rosters had to be made, meaning that teachers had to recreate google classrooms, seating charts, lesson plans, etc.

Lakeside High School students have been relocated across four different buildings due to the emergency closure of their school. This abrupt change, combined with the loss of internet and phone services for over a month, has severely disrupted the learning environment.

The challenges of this relocation included:

- **Disrupted Instruction & Academic Performance** – Research has shown that students who experience disruptions in their learning environments, such as shifting to remote learning or frequent school changes, struggle with lower academic performance. The lack of access to stable, in-person instruction can lead to significant learning loss, particularly in core subjects.
- **Decreased Engagement & Retention** – Without the consistency of a dedicated school building, students are facing difficulties adapting to new locations, routines, and schedules. Studies from the *National Bureau of Economic Research (NBER)* indicate that when students experience educational instability, retention rates decrease, and achievement gaps widen.
- **Limited Teacher-Student Interaction** – The forced displacement of the high school has made it challenging for teachers to maintain continuity in instruction. Research from the *American Educational Research Association* highlights that face-to-face interaction is crucial for student success, particularly for those requiring additional academic support.
- **Social and Emotional Strain** – Beyond academics, the sudden relocation has disrupted students' social structures, impacting their emotional well-being. Schools play a vital role in providing emotional stability and mental health support, which has been hindered by the recent crisis.

Lakeside High School students deserve the best possible education, and the challenges posed by their displacement cannot be ignored. Using these

3 days allowed the district to prioritize in-person learning, minimize disruption, and ensure that students receive the academic and emotional support needed to succeed. The state's support in this request is essential in maintaining the quality of education for Lakeside High School students and allowing them the opportunity to continue moving forward with a sense of normalcy.

Some students will never return to the building, and others will remain in this temporary situation for at least another year.

All we were able to do was react to the situation to the best of our ability and ensure that in-person learning was able to continue.