

Laura Jones.

As a proud Ashtabula Area City Schools school board member and committed community member, I feel compelled to address the unprecedented challenges our students and staff have faced following the Lakeside High School roof collapse. This was not just an unfortunate event but an extraordinary crisis that required immediate action, creative solutions, and relentless dedication from our educators and administrators. The efforts made by our district in overcoming this crisis are a testament to our commitment to our students and staff.

In December 2024, Lakeside High School experienced a partial roof collapse due to an extraordinary 5.5 feet of snow accumulation. The immense weight caused the roof to lift and separate from the building, rendering it unsafe for occupancy. This was an unforeseen and unparalleled event that placed significant strain on our district and required decisive action. Our administrative team immediately developed and implemented a strategic plan to ensure our students returned to in-person learning as quickly as possible. Despite the magnitude of this challenge, our team relocated all 850 students to temporary sites, including a former primary school and a former Catholic school, immediately following the winter break. This achievement required significant adjustments across the district but was vital to maintaining educational continuity.

Adding to this challenge, our teachers lost access to all the high school's instructional materials, supplies, and resources. The district promptly ordered new supplies and worked tirelessly to prepare the temporary locations for occupancy. Meanwhile, our dedicated teachers pivoted to remote learning, ensuring students received instruction and support despite the circumstances. However, as we all know, remote learning is no substitute for the structure and benefits of traditional in-person education.

Compounding the difficulties, our district was without internet or phone service for over a month, as our server was housed within the compromised building. Once we gained access to the server room, staff dismantled, relocated, repaired, and reassembled the system at a new site—all within a mere three-day window from December 18th to the 20th. Without these communication tools, remote learning during this time was not possible.

Amidst these extraordinary circumstances, our dedicated staff undertook monumental tasks to ensure students could return to a familiar and structured learning environment. They set up new classrooms, reworked the master schedule, created new bus routes, and adjusted school start and end times—essentially rebuilding an entire school operation in record time. Their dedication and hard work deserve our utmost appreciation.

These were not traditional 'calamity days.' While students were not in attendance, staff worked tirelessly during this period to ensure their safe and successful return to in-person learning. It is crucial to understand that these additional three waiver days were not just beneficial, but vital to achieving this goal. The urgency of this matter cannot be overstated.

We are asking that these essential waiver days be granted for several key reasons:

- **Ensure a Properly Structured Learning Environment:** Granting these days allowed us to rebuild stable, effective learning environments for our students.
- **Minimize Learning Loss:** Research shows that structured, in-person learning is critical for academic success. These additional days helped prevent further setbacks.
- **Support Student and Teacher Adaptation:** The transition to new learning spaces required time for both students and staff to establish routines and resume high-quality instruction.

Moreover, our district is already facing a \$1.7 million budget cut. Extending the school year for these three days would place an additional financial burden of approximately \$400,000 on the district—funds that are not available. But that is not the only barrier- we are making decisions as always, first, students.

From staffing and contractual issues, the changes that would need to be made to extended school year programs and services, the summer discovery programs, as well as graduation, student college experience days, and so many others are all issues that pose significant challenges to organizations beyond our students, faculty, and staff.

We appreciate the time you have taken to consider our request. Please recognize the immense efforts made by our educators and administrators and consider the well-being of our students.

Please support our request for these additional waiver days. This is a singular event, not one that features in the timely discussion of extended school days and calendars- that is its own issue.

This is a catastrophe that we are working through. Our district's resilience in the face of this crisis should serve as a model for future emergencies, and this decision is in the best interest of our students, staff, and community. Our superintendent and her team genuinely deserve commendation for the incredible job that they have done, with the well-being and education of our students first and foremost. That has been the drive behind decisions made, and it is the focus for this request- our students. Thank you for your time.