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Snow days may be going away

Widespread remote learning means schools can easily adjust during the winter

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Remember when a good winter storm meant no school and students making a beeline for the nearest sled hill?

With most school districts now better equipped for remote learning, traditional snow days might become a thing of the past.

“We now have the tools necessary, in the hands of teachers and students, to pivot to remote learning at any time during the school year,” said Lisa Hichens, superintendent of Batavia Unit District 101. “We are practiced and more comfortable with this learning mode and prefer to keep the school calendar intact as much as possible.”

Many suburban school districts currently allowing hybrid classes were bracing Monday to switch to full remote learning amid predictions of an overnight winter storm.

The National Weather Service said heavy snow was possible Monday night in the North, Northwest and West suburbs, with between 5 and 8 inches expected across much of the Chicago region.

Several school districts notified families at the start of winter of the likelihood of shifting students to remote learning in the event of inclement weather.

Ditching snow days could become the norm, even after schools resume in-person classes in a post-pandemic era as students get used to learning from home.

“With students and staff having become so well-versed within the remote learning environment, we will be able to easily move into a remote day when we encounter severe weather in the future,” said Heather Bennett, spokeswoman for Round Lake Area Unit District 116, which has been fully remote since the start of the pandemic.

Palatine Township Elementary District 15 informed families Monday that all winter weather-related school closures will be dealt with as e-learning days for the remainder of the school year.

“This year has presented unique challenges, but also opportunities,” the district message read. “Should the significant snow and potentially dangerous road conditions expected this week

materialize, the district plans to have students and teachers learn and teach remotely instead of calling a snow day that must be made up at the end of the year.”

At **Elgin Area School District U-46**, students started hybrid in-person classes this month after being mostly in remote mode since last March. Officials expect students will continue in distance learning now that the online platform is well established.

“We will be exercising an option allowed by the state of Illinois under which U-46 can use remote learning rather than use emergency closure days (or ‘snow days’),” according to a message on emergency closures posted on the district’s website.

“We will not need to make up a school day at the end of the school year as this Emergency Distance Learning Day will count as a full day of pupil attendance.”

Park Ridge-Niles School District 64 also announced today would be a remote learning day.