



Monday, April 27, 2020
Vol. 2, No. 15

Just So You Know

The following comment was posted on Facebook recently in reference to soft school closure:

"I find it interesting that school districts classified the days missed as 'Act of God Days' so they don't have to be made up. But God hasn't been allowed in schools for years."

It's hard to know the origin of such a comment or even the origin of such thinking, but if I saw it and read it, I'm sure many other people did as well. It's not the first time I've seen inaccuracies like this tossed into cyberspace as truth and devoured by a naïve readership. It is, however, the first time that I have seen this allegation presented as a baffling triangle of coronavirus, God, and school closure all linked to a plot to get out of teaching America's children.

The order to go into a "soft closure" of all public schools in Utah was the decision of Governor Gary Herbert at the advice of the Utah Health Department and the input of State Superintendent of Public Instruction Syd Dickson. It was based on science and scientific data and the fact that our state was in the midst of a pandemic which was never labeled in this process, at least to my knowledge, as an "act of God" although some may have used that cliché. The order relevant to the soft closure was that schools would continue to function as sources of learning through whatever means necessary. Teachers and other employees would continue to work and get paid, and students would continue to advance their education, all while practicing social distancing. That academic process began the day after the governor's soft closure order and has continued since, primarily through eLearning and learning packets.

Superintendent Dickson informed the state's school superintendents and charter school directors that as long as districts continued to hold school in meaningful ways and with respect to social distancing orders, those days during the soft closure would not have to be made up. The state board of education also supported this educational plan. Speaking on behalf of the Emery School District, I can assure our stakeholders that there was never a discussion about turning this horrific event into an opportunity to blow off work, get paid, and not have to make up days of school missed. To believe that such twisted thinking ever took place is absurd.

And what about this myth that God isn't allowed in schools? Those who enter a school building do not have to leave their religious beliefs at the door. For those who do pass through those school house doors, one of the first things they will recognize is the National Motto, *In God We Trust*, posted prominently for all to see. This posting is required by state law. State law also requires every public school to conduct a daily student-led Pledge of Allegiance which, as all good Americans know, includes the following: *"One nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all."*

It is also a myth that prayer is not allowed under any circumstances in public schools. There are numerous situations where prayer can be allowed as long as it is not forced on any individual who would not want to be subjected to such reverence. Nondenominational prayers are common at various events as well.

Schools in the Emery District function appropriately with respect to guidelines for allowing prayer as well as laws requiring posting the national motto and daily recitation of the Pledge of Allegiance. These things are common practice, and the myths that schools are Godless, unpatriotic, and using a pandemic as an excuse to not educate our students, are simply lies. It's time to put such mistruths to rest.

Superintendent Davis

Vision Statement:

"Education is a collaborative effort of home, community, and school. Students experience success on a daily basis and excel in performance through applying knowledge to real life situations. Schools are student-centered, guided by educators who possess excellent leadership and educational skills. Education expands beyond the classroom walls through the use of technology, and the curriculum meets the highest standards of an ever-changing world. Graduates are prepared to enter the workforce or continue their formal education at an advanced technical institution or a college or university. The Emery County School District believes that learning today provides leadership for tomorrow."

Updated information on school “dismissal” in the Emery District

The Emery School District’s Extended Administrative Team has been meeting weekly since the beginning of Governor Herbert’s announcement of public schools “soft closure” on March 13. The team consists of the superintendent, business manager, grade-level and special education supervisors, and technology, transportation, maintenance and food services supervisors. Together these administrators are assessing the effectiveness of the district’s closure plans, making changes where necessary, and interpreting and adopting new state directives as they come down from the governor and Utah State Board of Education. At the same time, the team is continuing the usual work of the district that it does routinely on a daily basis.

On Friday, April 17, Superintendent Davis offered an update on the Special Session of the Utah Legislature held the day previous. Of primary interest was the passage of S.B. 3005, Education Modifications, sponsored by Sen. Deidre Henderson. This bill provides a temporary waiver on the requirement to pass a basic civics test or alternate assessment as a condition of graduation for 2020. Because of the soft closure of schools, some seniors have been unable to take or retake the civics exam and may not have that opportunity before the end of the school year. Because of circumstances related to COVID-19 and beyond the control of the students, the USBE will waive the requirement for this school year. However, students hoping to receive a test waiver, will have to apply. Emery High Principal Steven Gordon and Green River High School Principal Kayce Fluckey are following up at their respective schools to make sure any student needing a waiver will meet the deadline.

Previously, the USBE approved waivers to State Board Rule for the current school year relevant to the 180-school day and 990-hour instructional requirement, and the third benchmark reading assessment while pushing back deadlines by two months for adopting a school fee schedule, application for CTE courses, expenditures of teacher state supply funds, and completion of 2020-21 School Lands Trust Plans. In order to qualify for these and other waivers, LEAs have to complete a School Closure Continuity of Education Plan outlining the district’s educational plan during the soft closure. The Emery District Plan has been submitted and approved by the USBE.

In other waivers necessitated by the soft closure, the USBE waived requirements for annual employee evaluations, and minimum clock hours and minimum C grade requirements for candidates enrolled in board-approved educator preparation licensure programs. Another waiver has been approved extending the deadline for educators with expiring licenses to renew without penalty to Oct. 31.

No waivers, however, have been granted with respect to high school graduation requirements. The USBE has indicated that districts and local boards may minimize the required number of graduation credits for their seniors, but that number may not be less than the state’s requirement of 24 credits. Districts are also encouraged to accept demonstrated proficiency in subject areas in lieu of completing typical assignments. What the state is emphasizing for this year’s graduates is that they are ready for post-secondary education and the workforce.

As our district moves into the final month of the school year, school administrators are assessing student progress relevant to online learning and learning packets. Teachers are identifying those students who are falling behind, seeking answers as to why these students are not keeping up with school work, and looking for ways to enhance their engagement. Seniors are especially at risk when they fall behind because of graduation requirements. No student will graduate from high school without meeting the minimum requirements set down by the state, the school district, and high schools. The USBE has advised LEAs to “move quickly to determine which students are eligible for graduation and which students will need targeted support to meet graduation requirements.”

Grading has also been under discussion. The Emery District Administrative Team has agreed that an A/B/P/I system is the most appropriate under the circumstances. That system has been recommended to administrators at each of the district’s schools and generally accepted at that level. The USBE has recommended that no F grades be given for fourth term because of the unique circumstances each student might be in during the soft closure.

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Emery District Memo from Superintendent Davis to:

April 24, 2020

Supervisors and Principals:

The efforts of the dedicated employees of the Emery School District to advance the education of our students during this soft closure has been nothing less than incredible. Many of our students, with the support of their families, have met the expectations of each educational challenge they've encountered. They have mastered standards, completed projects, and demonstrated proficiency. Others, for a variety of reasons, have fallen behind and now find themselves with incomplete assignments and subsequent learning gaps.

To support both the students who have mastered required standards as well as those who need additional time and instruction, the Emery School District Administrative Team has prepared the following year-end closeout plan and summer catch-up opportunities:

1. No new assignments will be given to students K-12 after Friday, May 8.
2. At that point, students who have earned a grade of A, B, or P will be finished with course work and will be given the grade earned on their fourth term report card and/or high school transcript. These students may, however, continue until the end of the school year (May 22) to work on previously assigned course work to bring their grade up if they choose to do so.
3. Students who have an incomplete (I) grade on May 8, will not be given additional work but will have the next two school weeks, until May 22, to bring that incomplete grade up to a passing (A, B, P) grade by successfully completing previously assigned work.
4. Students who do not bring that grade up to passing by the end of the school year, will have the opportunity of completing assignments during a summer catch-up program arranged and structured by each school administrator working with teachers and other stakeholders. It may involve continuation of online learning, learning packets, and/or small group work, if allowable. Summer catch-up work will generally be limited to core subjects and essential-skills classes as determined by each school.
5. The district will dedicate funding to the summer program by providing a specific budget to each school based on a formula that will include the number of students in the summer catch-up program while also taking into consideration additional funding for special ed students. Funds may be used at the discretion of the school but must be in line with soft-closure mitigation. If any school catch-up plan involves paying stipends to teachers, that amount will be based on the district's standard of \$25 per hour. Notification of the exact amount allocated to each school will be released as soon as possible.
6. Not every student will choose to participate in the catch-up program during the summer, and not every student in the program will get a passing grade. However, the catch-up program can continue into the school year, and funding used in ways to help fill the educational gaps. Early diagnostic testing going into the 2020-21 school year will help teachers know where each student is with respect to mastering core standards.
7. There will be some unique situations from school to school and student to student that may not be clearly addressed in these procedures. These are best addressed on the school level with teacher, principal, students, parents, etc. If assistance is needed beyond that, check with the district office grade-level supervisor.

Development of each school's summer catch-up program needs to get underway immediately, and once finalized, communicated to students and parents.

The district staff is viewing this program as another effort on the part of our schools and their administrators and teachers to work with every student in providing educational opportunities under extremely challenging circumstances. We have a great deal of faith in each of you in meeting the needs of your educational community.

This plan is in accordance with guidelines from the USBE which allow districts to terminate formal instruction and assignments before the end of the school calendar year as long as educational services continue to be provided. While the Emery District date of termination of instruction/assignments is May 8, teachers are expected to continue to honor their contracts and support their students who are finishing up previously assigned work and projects. Teachers will not be required to work beyond their contract unless they agree to participate in the summer program as arranged by each school administrator.

Thanks for your cooperation:
Superintendent Davis

Emery District Office upgrade priorities

District Office opened in 1964.

Remodels or rebuilds:

Original building completion date was 1900.

1st addition unknown

2nd Remodel and addition came in 1981 and included offices, hall, restrooms, lounge, and boardroom.

The Emery District Office's heating system is gas fired with mechanical cooling. There are five units.

The Heating and Cooling systems are getting old at the district office. There are five different units that cover areas of the building, and maintenance has had trouble maintaining temperature in the building because each unit controls two or three areas with one thermostat. The units themselves work well overall but have had ongoing maintenance problems, especially as they get older. Maintenance has had to replace several of the condensing units.

Electrical system for this building is inadequate for today's electrical and technology needs, especially in the Board Room where demand is greatest during meetings and trainings. It is anticipated that such demand will only increase in the future. According to the Maintenance Department, trying to run new cables is difficult in areas where the old building lines up with more recent additions and where remodeling has taken place.

It is important to note that this



CONCERNS: Heating/cooling systems, above, and structural damage, right, are among the reasons the Emery School District Facilities Committee has listed the district office as a high priority for upgrade. The building was first constructed in 1964.



building is not serviced by a fire alarm system.

Water and Sewer systems are marginal when it comes to water pressure and the water heating system.

Roofing is an ongoing problem in every district building, and the District Office is no exception with its Carlisle TPO roofing.

Asbestos still exists in the District Office. Being an older building, Asbestos was commonly used in construction. Over the years maintenance has had asbestos removal projects and has encapsulated any that is remaining. The only way to get to the remaining asbestos would be to remove the building. All areas that are remaining are maintained and inspected regularly.

All documentations are available to the public.

Structure: The outside of the building has cracks in the brick, and structure shifting has occurred. This does bring up structural concerns. The concrete pad that the building rests on shifts with temperature changes. Also, drainage away from the building is problematic. As an office, it is functional but limited in space for board meetings, trainings, and other gatherings that would benefit from larger accommodations.

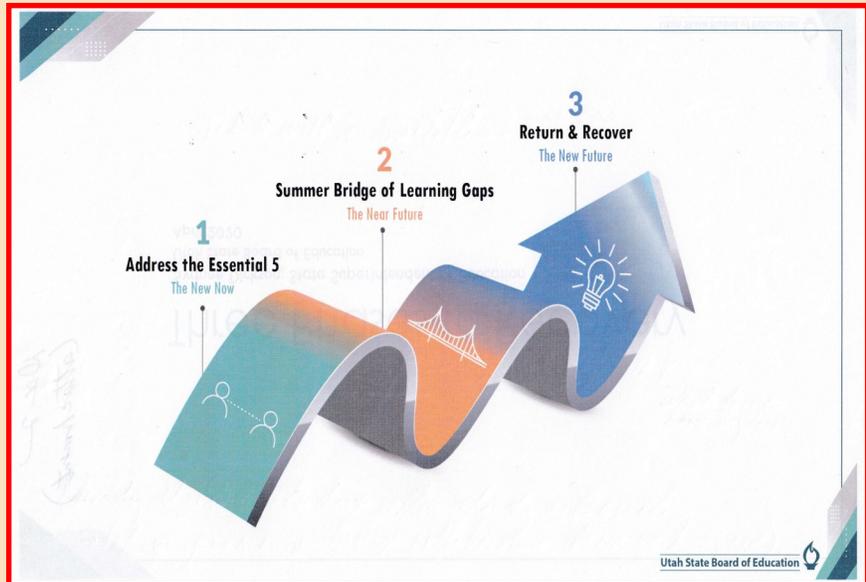
In the opinion of the Maintenance Department, funding a new building is a needed expense and would be an effective use of district resources.

The Three Phases to Recovery

Based on the Three Phases to Recovery Model from State Superintendent of Public Instruction Syd Dickson, public education in Utah is still in stage one, Address the Essentials. Looming ahead on the pathway to stability are stage two, Summer Bridge of Learning Gaps, and stage three, Return & Recover.

Superintendent Dickson has explained the objective of stage one as, "Mitigate the spread of COVID-19 through strict physical distancing measures, including school soft closure. During this time, we encourage school communities to focus efforts on the following five priorities, while also considering the health and safety of your staff and communities:

- Continue providing learning opportunities for all students
- Provide graduating seniors the context they need to transition
- Maximize opportunities for students to continue to receive meal services
- Make every effort to keep staff gainfully employed
- Support student and staff mental health and emotional needs.
- Phase one necessitates intense follow up with students and parents who are not engaged in school work. Teach-



ers and collaborative teams need to narrow down essential standards to just the most critical, and school districts should do more to make social/emotional learning support available to all stakeholders.

It is hoped that public schools will move into phase two (Summer Bridge of Learning Gaps) during the summer months. The superintendent said that the objective of phase two is to "begin assessing and addressing learning gaps to bridge the transition to recovery and the new future." To do so will include:

- Determining how federal funds, including CARES Act funds, may be used to fund summer learning
- Use formative assessments to determine gaps in learning
- Provide opportunities for small group and individual tutoring
- Develop and implement digital opportunities for review and catch up.
- Superintendent Dickson ex-

pressed concern that the learning gap stemming from soft closure could be amplified significantly by the typical summer learning gap, creating huge challenges for students and teachers as the 2020-21 school year begins.

Phase three, Return and Recover, will not likely get underway until fall or later when it is safe to relax physical distancing measures. In this phase, the educational community will continue adapting and innovating, and according to Superintendent Dickson, "We will overcome." This phase involves:

- Use of assessments as a formative tool in the fall to assess learning gaps and set baselines for the 2020-21 school year.
- Continue providing opportunities for small group and individual support
- Apply lessons learned from remote instruction to inform methods for personalizing instruction and validating learning that occurs outside the classroom.

Soft Closure guidance for parents and teachers

This is an unprecedented time in our country's educational history. We applaud the way our Utah educators have responded so quickly to adjusting their practice to provide remote learning opportunities for students and the increased support provided by parents and guardians. Given the Governor's directive to continue with school dismissal until the end of the year, it is important for us to consider our future interactions with our students and their families. Families want their students to learn and they want to be able to provide them the support they need in the learning process while balancing their other responsibilities. Yet, not all parents have the resources (e.g., time, emotional support, knowledge, skills, technology) to be able to provide this support.

As such, the Utah State Board of Education compiled a few ideas to consider supporting students, parents, and teachers. These considerations may help focus priorities and reduce stress while still developing the academic and social emotional skills of our youth.

Focusing the Learning on the Essentials

- Differentiation is always one of the most challenging aspects of teaching but in this circumstance, teachers also need to consider differentiation for circumstances in addition to differentiation for student ability.
- Be targeted with learning objectives, assignments

and activities, ensuring they are essential

- Keep appropriate expectations regarding the quantity of learning that can occur, the time required for learning to occur, and the resources required for learning to occur.
- Remember the importance of connections and relationships in learning as well as the impacts the trauma of COVID-19 is having on the families of your students.
- Focus on competency rather than time and activities.
- Allow students to demonstrate mastery in a variety of ways, through means that are accessible and available to them.
- What was successful in the classroom may not translate to the home, so taking time to adapt for the current remote learning circumstances.

Amount of Learning Time Recommendations

- Do not try to replicate a typical school-day schedule at home.
- Condense online engagement to a couple of hours a day with scheduled breaks away from the device for self-directed learning, activity, and time with family. This helps to address access challenges when families have multiple children and parents sharing devices.
- Keep schoolwork contained to the hours of the school day

Considerations for Supporting Families

- Provide families with a point person to reach out to if they have questions about the continuous learning process
- Acknowledge and validate the challenges families may be experiencing in their daily life, including their health, caregiving, employment, finances and housing, etc.
- Consider what you are asking of families to support their student's learning and be aware that families may lack the time and ability to engage in continuous learning, or it may be a sibling or neighbor that is responsible for the child's supervision and continuous learning
- Multiple logins and platforms can be difficult for students and families to navigate; consider ways to streamline
- Personalizing the needs for each family by taking time to communicate with parents; Consider scheduling office hours for parents to reach out with questions
- If a parent or guardian has concerns, the first thing to do is to contact the teacher. There is a shared goal that focuses on the success of your child. If the issue is not resolved, then reach out to the school principal for additional support.

District sets guidelines for year-end programs

In soft closure, planning for year-end programs requires the following: 1) A detailed plan 2) principal approval 3) written Health Department approval 4) District supervisor approval and 5) Superintendent approval. The following plans have received tentative approval but are awaiting health department documentation.

EHS Honoring Seniors:

We have ordered small yard signs with seniors' names on them. We will be placing them on the football field, and every Friday night in May we will turn the lights on for a couple hours to honor our seniors. We will also have a big banner recognizing our seniors.

EHS Graduation 2020:

We have planned a drive in or drive by Commencement program.

- Each graduate will be allowed one vehicle to enter the parking lot. The parent or guardian will be the driver and the graduate will be in the passenger seat.
- Cars may enter the parking lot at 5:30 pm. Commencement ceremony will begin at 6:00.
- Graduation will be held in the south parking lot, east of the softball field.
- We will have a semi flatbed trailer for our stage set up east of the softball field.
- Koal radio will broadcast on AM 750. Parents will be reminded upon entry to tune their radio to AM 750.
- Emery Telcom will also live stream Commencement exercise to their local channel.
- Law enforcement will be assisting in parking cars as well as directing traffic as the graduate leaves the parking lot.
- We will have our normal Valedictorian and Salutatorian talks. Administration will also give brief remarks, and a board member will offer acceptance of graduates.
- After remarks, law enforcement will excuse one car at a time to drive to a designated spot near the driveway where the student's name will be announced, and a board member will present the graduate with a flower and their diploma.
- The student will step out of the vehicle and grab the diploma that will be sitting on a table and pose for a picture with a board member, keeping in mind the social distancing requirements.
- As the graduates leave the parking lot they will put their gown in a box for return of the gown rental.
- The graduate will head South on center street and drive south to main and then home.
- Any extra vehicles or family members can align the sides of center street starting at 800 North.
- Information on the specifics of what vehicles are appropriate will be communicated directly with senior students and parents. (The vehicle must fit into a regulation size parking stall. A car or truck will be perfect. Every passenger must have a seatbelt. No one will be allowed in the bed of a truck.)
- All participants in our commencement exercise will be required to stay in their respective vehicle. Those students giving talks will be informed of how they will proceed prior to graduation day. Law enforcement and faculty members will help with the safety of social distancing and following state guidelines.
- We expect students/parents/guardians to be respectful during the ceremony. Please refrain from horn honking, air horns, etc. until you are south of 800 North.
- Our Seniors deserve a special ceremony; let's all do our part to make it a huge success.

GRHS Graduation May 21, 2020

We are still planning to hold graduation at Green River High School on the 21st at 7:00 P.M. We will hold graduation outside, in front of the building. The steps and entrance to the building will serve as the stage for the evening. We have asked to borrow a large blow up screen from the city teen center, which will sit on the top of the stairs/entrance to the building.

The parking lot will serve as seating (audience), cars will be the audience's seating for graduation. The senior class will determine how many "seats" each classmate receives for the program.

The faculty parking spots will be reserved for the senior class. Each senior will be in a golf cart. They will be able to acquire their cart from the golf course the afternoon of graduation to practice and then decorate it to their liking. For the program we will try and broadcast the entire program onto the screen, plus the senior slide show at the end of graduation. We will arrange to have microphones and speakers hooked up outside to broadcast speeches and music.

The podium for speeches and presentation of diplomas will be placed on the sidewalk at the bottom of the stairs. For presentation of diplomas the seniors will form a line in their carts (as they are lined up in their parking spots). They will drive through the circular drive, passing the podium, to receive their diploma and return to their designated parking spot.

I feel with this plan we will be able to keep students and parents as socially distanced as possible.

**Emery School District
Mission Statement:**

“The mission of the Emery County School District is to provide a comprehensive education that will prepare students to take a proactive and responsible role in an ever-changing world.”

District Calendar

All meetings are held electronically.

Tuesday, April 28: Digital Teaching & Learning Grant Team Meeting, 9 am

Friday, May 1: Administrative Team Meeting, 9 am

Monday, May 4: USSA Meeting, 9 am

Wednesday, May 6: School Board Meeting, 6:30/7 pm

Monday, May 11: Administrative Team Meeting, 9 am

Tuesday, May 12: Administrative Council Meeting, 8:30 am

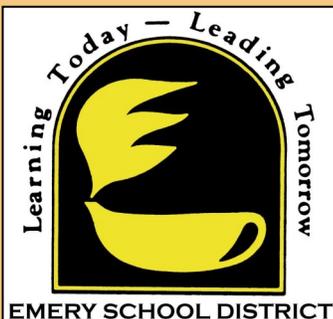


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STICKY NOTES:



During school soft closure, hours for district office personnel will fluctuate and include some work hours from home. Regular office hours will be from 10 am to 2 pm Monday through Friday. These changes are in line with social distancing practices as well as safety for vulnerable populations (65+, pre-existing conditions, pregnancy, etc.) The public is encouraged to take care of business with the district by phone where possible rather than coming in person to the office. Someone will be in the office during regular business hours to answer the phone.

The Emery School District Office will be closed from Tuesday, May 26 through Monday, June 1 for sanitation and deep cleaning. Phone calls will go directly to the receptionist who will take messages and notify the appropriate office staff member or supervisor. District office personnel will work from home and at other locations throughout the district during the closure.

The May 6 meeting of the Emery School Board will include the final public comment period on the district's new fee schedule and policy adoptions. The meeting will be at 7 pm on line. Information on how to access the meeting will be posted on the district website.