

Alternative Structured Learning Days aka “Blizzard Bags”

For the 2017-2018 school year, Westfield Public Schools (WPS) is piloting the use of Alternative Structured Learning Days, aka Blizzard Bag Days, following the 5th school cancellation day built into the school calendar. Beginning on the 6th school cancellation day and continuing for each subsequent cancellation day, students will complete Blizzard Bag project assignments and will not be required to make up the days in June. This will ensure that our last day of school for this school year is no later than June 21, 2018. WPS will survey all stakeholders after this year and review completed projects, and this will guide our decisions for the 2018-2019 school year. Please contact the building principal with additional questions regarding alternative structured learning days.

Guidelines for Students for completing Blizzard Bags

Students will receive their blizzard bag assignments from teachers following the fourth school cancellation day. Teachers will work with students to support their efforts in experiencing Blizzard Bag project assignments. WPS encourages students to use this as an opportunity to further their learning.

Guidelines for Parents for supporting Blizzard Bags

The assignments that have been developed by our teachers are intended to expand on learning that has taken place in the classroom. In the same way that homework is meant to practice learning, Blizzard Bag assignments involve concepts and skills to which students have already been introduced. For this reason, parents should not need to provide a great deal of support. Parents can provide access to technology if able, time and space to work on assignments, and encouragement to engage and persist with assignments.

Blizzard Bags Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

How many days are the assignments planned for? We have asked our teachers to provide assignments for three days at 2-3 hours per day. This would be the equivalent of 9 total hours of work for each student grades 1-12 and 3-6 total hours of work for each student in PreK and K. At the secondary level, it is important to note that the total hours should encompass all courses. These are estimated totals, and we understand that student work rates will vary.

When will the assignments be provided to students? Teachers will explain project assignments to students no later than after the fourth snow day. Students will be provided with specific instructions. The assignments will also be posted on school websites and linked through the district website.

What if students need help or have questions on Blizzard Bag Days? Teachers will check email from home and will be able to respond to student and parent questions.

What if my child usually gets assistance from the Special Education Teacher, ESL teacher, or other support teachers? These staff members will modify Blizzard Bags for their students according to student needs. These staff members will check-in with students' progress and provide any assistance necessary.

What if the students can't do projects on the Blizzard Bag Days because of child care arrangements?

Students may complete the projects on weekends, evenings, or other scheduled time off from school.

What if the students can't do projects on the Blizzard Bag Days because of lack of technology?

Principals will survey families to determine which students will need alternate project assignments that do not require technology. Students without home technology may also complete work on other days at community locations (i.e. Boys and Girls Club, YMCA, Athenaeum).

What if my child does not complete Blizzard Bag Day assignments? Because the Blizzard Bag Days represent school days that your student will not make up, they will be assessed in the same way that other required assignments are assessed in their classroom.

What if we don't use any Blizzard Bag Days? We will use these projects in class with students in the last weeks of school in June.