

Garrett County Public Schools

Virtual Learning Plan for Inclement Weather 2025-2026 School Year



Community Engagement and Board Approval Process

Before a county board may authorize the county superintendent to provide virtual education days to students the county board shall:

- (1) Discuss the topic at an open meeting; and
- (2) Vote affirmatively to authorize the county superintendent to provide virtual education days to students during a severe weather event.

A county board shall publish the county board’s plan for the use of virtual education days on the school system’s website.

Accordingly, Garrett County Public Schools will publicly present and discuss the Virtual Learning Plan for Inclement Weather at two regularly scheduled school board meetings as follows:

- September 9, 2025 - First read and discussion of the Virtual Learning Plan for Inclement Weather Plan

- October 14, 2025 - Second read, discussion, and Board decision specific to the Virtual Learning Plan for Inclement Weather Plan

There will be an opportunity for public comment from September 10-September 26, 2025. If approved, the plan will be posted on the school system’s website after October 14, 2025.

New Virtual Learning Components

A county superintendent may decide to provide a day of virtual education for public school students in the county only if:

- (1) The local school system has used all the days incorporated into its calendar for school closures for severe weather conditions;
- (2) The county board has authorized the county superintendent to provide virtual education days to students; and
- (3) The county superintendent determines that severe weather conditions are likely to prevent normal attendance at the public school.

A virtual learning day shall consist of not less than 4 hours of synchronous instruction, and asynchronous instruction designed to maximize the advantages of online access.

Garrett County Public Schools has incorporated three (3) inclement weather make-up days into the approved 2025-2026 school calendar. These days must be used prior to the implementation of virtual learning. Therefore, parents and the public can anticipate having three traditional snow days before the school system will implement virtual learning due to inclement weather. GCPS will follow standard processes specific to using pre-identified make-up days, including appropriate communication in advance to the community. Virtual learning days due to inclement weather will be announced in advance at the discretion of the Superintendent.

Additionally, all virtual learning days will include four (4) hours of synchronous virtual learning. This plan does not include any fully asynchronous virtual learning days.

GCPS Communication Plan Regarding Virtual Learning

The county superintendent may determine that severe weather conditions are likely to prevent normal attendance at the public school and call a Virtual Learning day. When this decision is made:

- (1) The county superintendent shall notify the school principals as soon as possible after the decision is made.
- (2) The school principal who receives notice of a virtual education day immediately shall notify the students, parents, and school staff of the implementation of the virtual education day.

In addition to the requirements above, GCPS will post the Virtual Learning Inclement Weather plan on the main page of the GCPS website. At the time of Board approval, GCPS will communicate the plan in various press releases that will be distributed to all current media outlets. Schools will also communicate school-specific details with their staff, students, and parents using a variety of strategies to ensure that each stakeholder group is prepared to implement virtual learning based on the approved plan.

When the superintendent makes the decision to move the system into virtual learning due to inclement weather, GCPS will use all current media outlets to inform schools and the community with as much notice as possible. Families and staff who have signed up for SchoolMessenger will also receive notice through this forum, similar to any other school-related message. The announcement will indicate that GCPS will be moving to a **Virtual Learning Day**.

Anyone experiencing technical difficulties on a virtual learning day may call the IT Helpdesk at 1-888-285-7254 or email helpdesk@garrettcountyschools.org for assistance between the hours of 8:00 a.m. and 4:00 p.m.

It is important to note that implementing a virtual learning day due to inclement weather will be another tool in the toolbox for GCPS. This option will be used on a

case-by-case basis, particularly when there is confidence in the forecast that provides advance notice of significant storms. GCPS will continue to utilize 2-hour delays, 3-hour delays, 3-hour early dismissals, and traditional snow days when weather conditions warrant the use of these options. There are no pre-planned virtual learning days included in this plan.

Devices, Access to Wi-Fi, and Access to Instructional Materials

GCPS provides a 1:1 device ratio for students and staff to support student learning and instructional needs. All secondary students have a GCPS-issued laptop that is taken home daily. GCPS also provides a device for all elementary students. These devices will be distributed for at-home virtual learning in advance of inclement weather and returned to the school building upon return to in-person instruction. Instructional staff are also provided a GCPS-issued laptop to utilize at school and at home to complete work-related assignments.

All assignments will be posted in the Schoology platform for virtual learning days. In the event that a student does not have internet connectivity at home, the student will be provided with hard copies of assignments in advance, when possible. Teachers will be expected to provide meaningful direct instruction to support students without internet connectivity and those who were absent upon return to school. See attendance procedures for further details. GCPS is committed to ensuring all students, including students with disabilities, homeless students, and Multilingual learners, have the necessary instructional materials during virtual learning. Any parent who has concerns with their child accessing instruction should contact their child's school principal.

Staff without internet connectivity will be expected to go to the nearest GCPS location or their school to access Wi-Fi to deliver instruction and/or to complete the essential functions of their job. Should the staff member be unable to reach a location with the internet or their job site, the staff member will contact their direct supervisor to discuss alternatives for the day. The administrator will arrange appropriate synchronous instruction for the students involved.

Accommodations for Students

Specific strategies for the continued implementation of individualized education programs during virtual learning days, including specially designed instruction, related services, supplementary aids and services, and accommodations, are detailed below.

All special education services will continue to be provided as outlined in the student's Individualized Education Program (IEP). All services will be provided synchronously, asynchronously, or through supplemental materials as outlined under the Emergency Conditions section of the student's IEP. Services may be provided in a whole group virtual setting, one-on-one through Google Meet, and/or through supplemental materials posted in Schoology. All services will be a priority, including secondary transition services. All general education teachers are informed of IEP, 504 student, and Multilingual (ML) student plans through PowerSchool and IEP snapshots to ensure all services are provided.

Case managers will work closely with families to schedule and arrange special education services in accordance with a student's IEP. This communication will be ongoing and essential to providing services on a virtual learning day. In some unique situations where virtual services are not appropriate, special education/related services will be made up to the child upon returning to in-person instruction. Case managers and service providers will maintain a log of services provided during virtual instruction.

All supplementary aids/services will continue to be provided as outlined on the student's IEP. If appropriate, students will receive their supplementary aids/services virtually. In some situations, students may have learning tools sent home prior to the virtual learning day to have access to when they are at home learning.

General education teachers and special education teachers will work collaboratively to ensure that all students with disabilities receive the accommodations outlined in their IEP or Section 504 Plan. Accommodations will be provided through Schoology, Google Meet, or through supplemental materials sent home prior to the virtual learning day.

504 student accommodations will continue to be available to teachers in real-time through their PowerTeacher portal to monitor access and implementation. IEP student accommodations are provided to general education teachers through the IEP Snapshot. GCPS will continue to require the teacher's signature upon electronically viewing/hard copy receipt of the student's accommodations, as well as when updates on those accommodations are made. Furthermore, to aid teachers in this process, GCPS developed the "Accommodations Guide for Distance Learning" for our students with special learning needs. This tool is meant to aid our faculty and staff in methods of helping to provide both our IEP and 504 students with the accommodations they have in a virtual classroom.

All IEP meetings will continue in a virtual format, through Google Meet, with parent permission. If parents would prefer to have their child's IEP meeting in person, the IEP meeting will be rescheduled upon parent request. All IEP meetings scheduled on a virtual learning day will be moved to the afternoon to ensure all students have access to synchronous instruction in the morning.

Attendance Procedures for Virtual Learning Days

A plan to ensure that attendance will be taken for all students and teachers during each virtual education day is detailed below and includes opportunities for students to make up work missed during virtual learning when they return to in-person school. Students with internet access will be expected to join live synchronous instruction through Google Meet to be counted present during each virtual learning day due to inclement weather. There will be a minimum of **four** hours of synchronous instruction, and attendance will be documented in PowerSchool for all students.

For students without internet access at home, paper assignments will be provided prior to the virtual learning day. Students will be marked present if they submit their work upon returning to in-person instruction.

In the event that alternate work cannot be provided prior to the virtual learning day, the student will be granted an additional day to complete the work to be counted present for the virtual day. If the work is not submitted within this time frame, the student will be counted absent, and the makeup policy for work should be followed. If the student returns the work completed on the next scheduled school day as required, the student's attendance for the virtual learning day **will** need to be changed from absent to present.

If a student is absent on a virtual learning day, work is to be turned in based on the GCPS make-up work policy found in the Student's Rights and Responsibilities Handbook.

DEFINITIONS

Present ~ a student will be marked as present when there is evidence of the following:

- Attending classes via Google Meet during the scheduled time
- Cameras turned on during the Google Meet

SECONDARY SCHOOLS - students must attend at least half of the class period to be considered present (ex, 60-minute class, student attends a minimum of 30 minutes). Attendance is taken each period just like a normal school day.

ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS - students must attend at least three hours of synchronous instruction to be in attendance the full day. Students attending between one and three hours will be marked present for half a day. Any student attending less than one hour will be marked absent for the entire day.

Absent ~ a student will be marked as absent when there is NO evidence of the following:

- Attending classes via Google Meet during the scheduled time
- Not turning on their camera during the Google Meet

VIRTUAL INCLEMENT WEATHER DAY RELATED ABSENCE CODE AND DEFINITIONS

CODE 07 (Hazardous Weather) - Assigned for any student who DOES NOT attend their virtual synchronous classes. This is an excused absence, and missed work can be made up based on the GCPS Student Handbook.

Procedure for Staff Attendance for Virtual Learning Days:

All buildings will be required to utilize the electronic time and attendance Google sheet to collect staff attendance.

Virtual Learning Model

A model for virtual learning, including schedules for elementary and secondary students and teachers, is detailed below:

Elementary Sample Schedule (PK-3 through 5th Grade)

Synchronous learning for all students will be held from 8:15-12:30 with age-appropriate breaks, followed by asynchronous work in the afternoon.

Morning Meeting/Health	8:15-8:30
English Language Arts	8:30-9:30
Resource	9:30-10:00
ELA Tiered Instruction	10:00-10:30
Science/Social Studies/Health	10:30-11:00
Social Emotional Learning	11:00-11:30
Math (Tiered instruction from 12:00-12:30)	11:30-12:30
Lunch	12:30-1:00
Asynchronous Work	1:00-3:00

*Administrators and teachers will share specific student/class schedules with families.

Secondary School Sample Schedule (6th grade through 12th grade)

Synchronous learning for all students will be from 8:15-12:30, followed by asynchronous work in the afternoon.

Period 1	8:15-9:00
Period 2	9:05-9:50
Period 3	9:55-10:40
Period 4	10:45-11:30
Period 5	11:35-12:25
Lunch	12:30-1:00
Asynchronous Work	1:00-3:00

*Administrators and teachers will share specific student/class schedules with families.

Teacher Sample Schedule

Planning/Prep	8:00-8:15
Period 1- US History	8:15-9:00
Period 2- Planning	9:05-9:50
Period 3- US History	9:55-10:40
Period 4- World History	10:45-11:30
Period 5- World History	11:35-12:25
Lunch	12:30-1:00
1:00-3:36	Planning, IEP meetings, etc. (based on the needs of students/teacher)

New this year, in the event that a 2-hour delay is needed on a virtual learning day, the following sample schedules have been created and are detailed below for elementary and secondary grade bands:

Elementary 2 Hour Delay Virtual Schedule Sample:

Morning Meeting/Health	10:15-10:30
English Language Arts	10:30-11:30
Resource	11:30-12:00
Tiered Instruction	12:00-12:30
Lunch	12:30-1:00
Science/Social Studies	1:00-1:30
Social Emotional Learning	1:30-2:00
Math	2:00-3:00
Planning	3:00- end of teacher duty day

*Administrators and teachers will share specific student/class schedules with families.

Secondary 2 Hour Delay Virtual Schedule Sample:

Period 1	10:15-11:00
Period 2	11:00-11:45
Period 3	11:45-12:30
Lunch	12:30-1:00
Period 4	1:00-1:45
Period 5	1:45-2:30
Intervention Supports	2:30-3:00
Planning	3:00-end of teacher duty day

*Administrators and teachers will share specific student/class schedules with families.

Aligned with the negotiated contract for staff, if a 2-hour delay for virtual learning is implemented, nothing will be scheduled during 8:00-10:15, allowing staff and students

time to adjust their schedule and plans to implement the adjusted virtual day schedule. Accordingly, when a 2-hour delay occurs on a virtual learning day, all IEP/504 or other student meetings scheduled between 8:00-10:15 will be rescheduled for later in the day or another day. Administration will be responsible for providing coverage for IEP and 504 meetings scheduled after 10:15 a.m.

Virtual Learning Day: Staff Procedures and Guidelines

The purpose of this section of the plan is to provide clear communication and procedures to staff specific to the Virtual Learning Plan.

GCPS will make every effort to provide advanced notice (approximately 8:30 a.m. the day prior) to school administrators of a potential weather event that **may** result in the system moving to a virtual learning day. This notification is intended to allow staff to prepare for the **possibility** of a virtual learning day, which includes ensuring that all students and staff take home computers and other relevant instructional materials. It is important to note, the **official decision** to move to virtual learning may not be made until the morning of the weather event. When the final decision has been made for the virtual learning day, GCPS staff and the community will be notified on all social media outlets. This will allow for “real-time” decision-making as it relates to having a virtual learning instructional day in the midst of inclement weather.

Additional information specific to winter operations can be found on our website: <https://www.gcps.net/page/winter-operation-information>. Please note that it is especially prudent for staff to anticipate and prepare their students for the **possibility** of a virtual learning day when the National Weather Service issues an ice or snowstorm watch or warning. Weather information can be found at this website: <https://www.noaa.gov/>

Preparation for Virtual Learning:

Staff should prepare lessons in Schoology in advance for at least 2 consecutive virtual learning days. Emergency packets for students without the internet should also be prepared in advance for at least 2 consecutive days and sent home with appropriate students for use on virtual learning days. It is essential that both staff and students are familiar with using Schoology for learning to support the effective transition between in-person and virtual instruction.

To support the implementation of real-time calls, staff may take advantage of Professional Learning Community time to review student data/student needs and collaboratively prepare intentional lessons for this purpose.

Instructional Schedules:

A required component of the plan, per Maryland statute, is that GCPS will implement a minimum of four hours of synchronous instruction for all students when implementing synchronous virtual learning days.

When reviewing sample instructional schedules, instructional times run from 8:15-12:30 in order to ensure a consistent instructional schedule for PK-12 and to complete the required synchronous instruction for students before lunch time. The high school schedule incorporates a five-minute transition between classes. It is understood that age-appropriate breaks and natural transitions will occur during the synchronous instructional period as students switch classes, engage in brain breaks, and complete other age-appropriate activities. Teachers are encouraged to use appropriate transition activities/strategies to enhance this process. For example, a teacher may decide to start their class with a bell ringer or warm-up for students to complete as they arrive and settle into the virtual learning platform. This will allow the teacher ample time as well to transition their materials from class to class, as necessary.

Teacher Schedules:

After 12:30, teachers will be provided time for lunch and planning. Teachers will also need to attend IEP/504 meetings that were previously scheduled on that day. This time will not be used for professional development or school meetings. Principals do have the autonomy to call an emergency staff meeting if circumstances warrant it.

Non-Teaching Staff Duties:

Staff who fall under this category will work with their principal and/or supervisor to determine how the essential functions of their job can be performed to support students and/or the operations of the school system on synchronous virtual learning days. It is understood that if a county Board of Education provides a day of virtual education for public school students in the county, the local school system shall offer public school employees who are not assigned to work during the virtual education day an opportunity to make up the lost work through other duties before the beginning of the next school year.

Procedure for Staff Without Internet for Virtual Learning Days:

Staff in this situation will need to go to the nearest GCPS location or their school to access Wi-Fi to deliver instruction and/or to complete the essential functions of their job. Should the staff member be unable to reach a location with the internet or their job site, the staff member should contact their direct supervisor to discuss alternatives for the day.

A list of building-level staff who do not have internet at home and who need to work onsite, either at the nearest GCPS location or their school, will be provided to principals and IT. The GCPS location the individual intends to use will also be provided. If an individual has indicated that he/she will report to a GCPS location

other than his/her school, IT will program the person's GCPS badge to allow access to the building for the virtual learning day. Other logistics will be determined between the employee and the principal of the building.

Staff Emergency Procedures for Virtual Learning Days (i.e., road closure):

Similar to above, should a staff member be unable to reach a location with the internet or their job site, the staff member should contact their direct supervisor to discuss alternatives for the day.

In this situation, if the staff member is going to a GCPS location other than his/her school location to work, the individual should email security@garrettcountyschools.org for badge access, as well as the school principal to coordinate any other logistics needed.

Teachers' plans need to be accessible and applicable to a virtual learning format in the event of an emergency. Plans will be communicated with the administrator.

Process for Staff Taking Leave When a Substitute is Needed for a Learning Virtual Day:

As mentioned previously, GCPS is required to have at least four hours of synchronous learning for all students. For this reason, if a staff member needs to take leave on a virtual learning day, the staff member should enter the absence in AESOP and communicate with their building administrator via email that they have done so and publish their plans/student assignments in Schoology. The following procedures are also then necessary:

- The staff member will upload sub plans as an attached file or link for each class period in the "notes" to substitute. Sub plans should include all standard components:
 - Instructional plan
 - Instructional schedule
 - Google Meet codes/links
 - Accommodations for students with IEPs, 504s, BIPs (list/summary)
 - Student rosters for attendance
 - Student assignments (which can be linked within the sub plans or uploaded as separate files)
- The substitute teacher will be responsible for emailing attendance to the classroom teacher and the attendance secretary or designee.
- If no sub picks up the job, building administration will coordinate coverage similar to a regular day.

Staff may take leave in half-day or whole-day increments. A morning-only absence requiring a substitute will run from 8:00-11:45 a.m. The staff member will be responsible for scheduled synchronous learning time with their students from 11:45-12:30 p.m.

An afternoon-only absence will **not** require a sub and should be noted as such in AESOP. In the instance of an afternoon-only absence, administration will coordinate class coverage from 11:45-12:30 p.m. An afternoon absence for instructional staff will run from 11:45-3:36.

Should an individual take a full-day absence requiring a substitute, the individual should enter the absence requesting a full-day substitute.

Times may have to be customized in AESOP to reflect these hours/times above.

In the event of an absence on a 2-hour delay for a virtual learning day, the employee should request a substitute for the whole day (10:15- end of the teacher duty day), similar to when schools are on a delay with in-person learning.

Procedure for Staff Attendance for Virtual Learning Days:

All buildings will be required to utilize the electronic time and attendance Google sheet to collect staff attendance.

Procedures for Student Attendance for Synchronous Learning Day:

GCPS is required to take attendance for students each virtual learning day. Staff are expected to maintain student attendance and document student attendance daily in PowerSchool based on the guidelines set forth in the Inclement Weather Virtual Learning Plan. All teachers will monitor Google Meet and formally take attendance daily based on the students meeting the definition of present.

It should be noted that students **with** internet access at home are expected to be on a live Google Meet to be considered present for instruction with their camera on. If they are not, the student should be marked absent. Make-up work will need to be provided, and we will follow the policy on make-up work. The attendance code will **not** need to be changed after the student submits the make-up work.

Teachers will need to poll their students (secondary) or families (elementary) to determine a list of their students who do not have internet access at home. For students without internet access at home, paperwork assignments must be provided prior to the virtual learning day. In the event that alternate work cannot be provided prior to the virtual learning day, the student will be granted an additional day to complete the work to be counted present for the virtual inclement weather day. If the work is not submitted within this time frame, the student will be counted absent, and the makeup work policy should be followed. If the student returns the work completed on the next scheduled school day, the student's attendance **will** need to be changed from absent to present in this situation. The teacher will need to notify the person in charge of maintaining the daily attendance in each building to ensure the student's attendance is updated accordingly. This only applies to students **without** internet access.

If attendance needs to be changed due to late arrival or early dismissal after attendance has been submitted, the teacher is expected to communicate this change with the attendance secretary.

The attendance code of 07 (hazardous weather) will be used for all absences, which is an excused absence. Please note, a plan to provide opportunities for students to make up work missed during virtual education days when they return to in-person school is required by statute. Teachers are expected to provide meaningful direct instruction to students who are absent for virtual learning to make up work outside of virtual learning.