e-Learning Days:
Preparing for Winter-Weather Cancellations
Weather-related cancellations take a toll on districts located in regions with harsh climates. Any time you have an interruption in instruction time, you stand to lose your classroom momentum and your students’ focus. More districts are instating e-Learning days in place of school cancellations, but there are many obstacles to consider when getting started and having the right digital tools is essential for e-Learning success.

In this guide, we offer step-by-step instruction for planning and implementing e-Learning days in your district. With best practices from districts who have successfully launched e-Learning programs and a handy checklist for getting started, time lost on cancellations can be a thing of the past.

### e-Learning District Profile
Forsyth County School District, Georgia

- 46,300 Students
- 37 Schools
- Eliminated the need for make-up days

Forsyth County School District knows how winter’s wrath can wreak havoc on a school schedule. In 2014, the district missed over a week of school due to dangerous weather conditions. Now when the district has a cancellation, they use the itslearning Learning Management System (LMS) to implement e-Learning days. Since they have perfected their inclement weather plan, they no longer include make-up days in their school calendar.
Districts use e-Learning days as an alternative to school cancellations. Instead of losing an entire day of classroom activities, all lessons and course work are conducted virtually with online tools and apps. Teachers are expected to provide students with assignments related to the curriculum and students are expected to complete tasks as assigned.

By providing online instruction when schools is interrupted by inclement weather, districts can maintain the flow of teaching and learning and avoid taking away days from school breaks and summer vacations.
4 Major Steps to e-Learning Success

It’s one thing to have a plan, it’s another thing entirely to have a clear, actionable vision that takes all potential stakeholders and obstacles into consideration. That’s why for e-Learning days to be successful, meticulous planning is key.

Challenges that districts often face when getting started with e-Learning days include:

- Unclear expectations of students and parents
- Lack of accommodations for students without access
- Disparate digital tools causing confusion and wasted time

Avoid the common pitfalls of e-Learning day implementation and start with the following 4 steps for building a well-defined and clearly communicated policy.
1 Gain Support from All Stakeholders

Before mapping out your strategy for e-Learning days, make sure that stakeholders in your district are informed of your intentions and be sure to get their feedback. This includes your curriculum, technology and instructional staff, as well as students and parents. Start by sending a survey to everyone involved. Use this as a chance to introduce them to the idea and to open-up the discussion for ideas and concerns. In these initial stages, also make sure you have sign-off from staff members on the roles they’ll play in e-Learning days.
Identify Common Oversights and Challenges

A common obstacle that districts face when considering e-Learning days is ensuring digital equity. Some students might not have laptops or internet access at home, or could have power outages due to the inclement weather. Here are a few ways to make sure all students can take part in e-Learning days:

1. When adopting new classroom technology, make sure that they offer full functionality on all mobile devices. Though some students might not have a computer at home, they might have access to a smart phone or tablet.

2. Include a make-up clause in your policy. If you assign tasks or homework on your e-Learning days, give students with no access extra days to make-up the work once school is back in session.

3. Address digital equity early in the year by providing students who lack access with hotspot devices for internet or loaner laptops/tablets for the winter months.

The most effective way to identify complications in your e-Learning processes is to practice in advance. Each year, include a mandatory, district-wide dry-run. Getting in some practice time ensures smooth execution and compliance when the sudden need for an e-Learning day arises. This is also a great time to ensure that all stakeholders are properly trained on your digital systems.

Develop Your e-Learning Day Lesson Plan

Treat e-Learning days like any other school day by determining a start and stop time, "office hours" for teachers, specific course times, study breaks, and even a "recess" break.

Engage students during e-Learning days just as you would with face-to-face instruction. Consider these powerful digital tools to make e-Learning fun and informative:

- **Polls & Surveys**: Get students excited at the start of the day with a poll or a survey. Use them to give class instructions, test students on course materials, or get student feedback on recent lessons.

- **Discussion Boards**: An excellent tool for fueling student engagement, discussion boards allow you to facilitate resource sharing, peer-to-peer assessments, or debates on current events.

- **Video Recordings**: Students will be delighted to receive their daily instructions in the form of a video. Pre-record lessons to better convey difficult concepts and provide clear details on assignments.

- **Video Conferencing**: Set up video conferences with students. Schedule a few minutes with each student as a virtual check-in, or use it to clarify instruction for students that have questions.

- **Educational Games**: Expand on lessons by providing students with digital word games, puzzles, simulation exercises, and other games that can improve understanding of concepts and help develop critical thinking skills.

- **Engaging Content**: A digital repository with millions of standards-aligned resources makes it possible to quickly and easily personalize lessons whether in the classroom or working from home.
Ensure Accountability

Working from home is a great experience for students entering a 21st-century workforce. Self-management is an essential life skill, but it can be difficult for some students facing the varied distractions of home, like a younger sibling who doesn't have e-Learning days or the constant lure of Snapchat.

To keep students from dallying too much during e-Learning days, follow these simple rules:

**Don't give them any excuse.**
Provide students with a central hub for all classroom materials, assignments, digital tools, and anything else required to complete tasks. This way they can't claim that they didn't know where to find materials or were unclear on the instructions.

**Assign real-time tasks.**
Include a task that requires visible online activity, like a group discussion or video conference, or require that assignments be submitted by a specific time.

**Check in.**
Easily check in with students who are inactive using instant messaging or video conferences.

**Give voice and choice.**
Ensure student engagement by giving them choice in how they show what they know. Rather than requiring all students to submit written assignments, give them the option to submit a video, drawing, song or other evidence of learning.

“Our Online Learning Plan for School Closures uses itslearning to engage students, distribute assignments, and facilitate communication between teachers, students and parents when weather prohibits face-to-face interaction.”

Jason Naile,
Director of Instructional Technology and Media, Forsyth County Schools
Streamline e-Learning Days with itslearning

Carefully planned and communicated procedures paired with district-wide adoption of a centralized digital learning environment makes e-Learning days run smoothly. With course materials that can easily be aligned to standards, robust tools for communication and collaboration, and the freedom of mobility, itslearning simplifies the e-Learning process from initial planning to execution.

itslearning provides district administrators with the comfort of knowing that cancellations won’t lead to loads of make-up days, teachers can continue their lessons without losing momentum, parents will be assured that their students are staying on track with school work, and students will stay connected to their learning all year round.
Checklist
Planning e-Learning Days

TO DO:

1. Receive input and approval from all key stakeholders.

2. Create a clear procedural plan for when cancellations occur.

3. Provide detailed instructions to parents and students on how to participate in e-Learning days.

4. Provide access or concessions for students who don’t have devices or internet access at home.

5. Complete a dry run of your process with everyone involved.

6. Provide a centralized hub for administrators, teachers, students, and parents to easily access all digital tools, resources, and communication.
How we can help you...

With itslearning as your partner in digital curriculum management, school districts can extend their investment in existing curriculum resources by streamlining resource management and providing more meaningful and consistent access to instructional materials across the district.

To learn more about itslearning visit itslearning.com