

EDUCATION

U.D. sticks to traditional school days for 2019-20

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UPPER DARBY » The Upper Darby School Board was not flexible Tuesday night on a state program that will allow schools to have instructional days outside of their brick-and-mortar buildings if the circumstances require it.

The board rejected at its education and pupil services committee meeting to submit an application to the Pennsylvania Department of Education for acceptance into the Flexible Instructional Day Program, a new plan built into the state's school code this year for use by public schools, "as an alternate approach to delivering instruction if a circumstance arises that prevents instruction in customary manner," per the department's website. Days used in this program count toward the mandated 180 instructional

days per school year.

The department lists hazardous weather, law enforcement emergency and a disease epidemic as one of a number of circumstances that merit a flexible instructional day. No more than five such days may be used per school year.

For a school district of 12,500 students, there was a lot of "unknowns," according to district Director of Curriculum Christine Kelley regarding the implementation of the program. Beyond that, the district would still be responsible for handling health services for students, instruction to special education students and keeping track of attendance on those days. Assistant Superintendent Ed Marshaleck said there would need to be individualized education program meetings for 2,500 students to accommodate instruction on such days.

Concerns of accessibility

across the district to an online learning platform and access to speech and physical therapy were other talking points on the matter (specifics about accommodating any one of these points was not thoroughly discussed).

Creating a small-scale pilot program in the district did not have support either. The board did hear about seven of the state's 500 districts who did a program, but there was no report for them to reference to see about the effects.

A Pennsylvania Department of Education spokesman said 19 school districts and one career and technical center have applied to the department as of early Wednesday afternoon, none from Delaware County. The school districts of Carlisle, Central York, Elizabeth Forward, Seneca Valley and Evergreen Community Charter School have all used at

least one flexible day when piloting the program in their respective schools. Only Evergreen has submitted an application so far.

The FID program was presented to the board Tuesday should it have a desire to file an application for the program before the Sept. 1 deadline. A resolution must then be passed by a district's school board by Sept. 30 and sent to PDE, which will approve or deny a district's application no later than Nov. 1. According to PDE, districts who are approved for the program are good for three years and may renew after that.

