



Barnwell County School District

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Phone: 803-541-1300

Crystal F. Stapleton, Ed.D., Superintendent

October 4, 2024

Dear BCSD Parents and Guardians,

We sincerely hope this letter finds you and your family safe following the impact of Hurricane Helene. Our thoughts remain with all those who have been affected by the storm. We understand the difficulties many in our community have faced during this time, and we want to provide some important updates regarding the recent closures of schools.

School Reopening:

We are immensely grateful for the dedication of our staff and administrators in preparing for the reopening of schools. We were fortunate our schools had power, Internet services, and were operationally ready to welcome our students and staff back, and we are so grateful for the work of countywide agencies in helping make that happen. While we know the recovery process is ongoing, we hope that reopening schools has helped restore a sense of normalcy for our students. The decisions regarding the closing or reopening of schools are never made lightly. These choices involve careful consideration and are informed by the hard work and collaboration of many individuals and agencies. We know the inconvenience closures cause for our families, but please know the safety of our students and staff is of utmost importance.

Power and Safety Concerns:

By the time we reopened schools on Wednesday morning, approximately 3% of our county was without power, which moved to approximately 1% by Thursday morning. While we wish it was 0%, we were told by officials that the power may not be restored to some of those homes until later because of extenuating circumstances that go beyond a normal restoration process. Currently, less than 1% of our county remains without power, and power crews are working around the clock to restore service. We are committed to ensuring all of our students are supported. We understand that some families may still be experiencing challenges, and we encourage you to reach out to us if you need any assistance. The safety and well-being of our students is our top priority.

Gratitude to our Staff and Community:

We are immensely grateful for the dedication of our staff and administrators in preparing for the reopening of schools. In the days following Hurricane Helene, many staff members volunteered to help by working shifts at our shelter, preparing meals for the community from a school kitchen, driving our buses to transport families for showers, working on our campuses to ensure schools were ready, and answering hotlines 24 hours a day in the county's Emergency Operations Center. We received countless texts and calls from individuals eager to help, and it's this commitment that makes our school system and community such a wonderful place to be.

We would like to extend our heartfelt gratitude to our county's emergency responders and emergency management officials. The work they do during emergencies often goes unnoticed. It's truly remarkable. I wish everyone could witness their efforts firsthand. They work around the clock to coordinate resources and agencies during disasters, ensuring that roads are checked, basic necessities are provided, and conditions are safe for our return to school. They've been instrumental in keeping us informed about road safety for our transportation

department, helping set up the emergency shelter for families, distributing water to those waiting for power restoration, and so much more. Our district administrative team met with multiple agencies daily at the Emergency Operations Center to continue monitoring conditions countywide. Their dedication to protecting the citizens of Barnwell County is deeply appreciated, and we are thankful for their unwavering support.

We are also proud of the many acts of kindness, generosity, and support that were displayed by members of our community during this difficult time. The strength and unity shown in Barnwell County have been truly inspiring.

Make-up Days due to School Closures:

In light of the recent guidance from the South Carolina Department of Education and state law regarding the missed school days due to Hurricane Helene, we want to inform you of an emergency change to our school calendar. As you know, we have experienced several unexpected closures early in the 2024-2025 school year, including three eLearning days in August and one on September 27th. With the recent aftermath of Hurricane Helene, we also had two full school closure days due to widespread power outages and conditions countywide.

To comply with state regulations, we must make up the missed school days from Monday, September 30th, and Tuesday, October 1st. After an emergency meeting with district and school leaders and given the limited times we are able to adjust our schedule for the next few months, we will be making an emergency change to the Teacher Inservice Day next week. **Wednesday, October 9th will now be an Early Release Day.** Originally designated as a Parent Conference Day with no student attendance, all schools in Barnwell County will operate as a regular school day with early release dismissal times. Each school will send out reminders regarding the specific early release times for their students. We are also in the process of determining the make-up day for the school closure on October 1st and will communicate that information to you as soon as possible.

Thank you for your understanding and support during this challenging time. If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to reach out to your child's school.

Support and Resources:

As we continue to respond to the aftermath of Hurricane Helene, if your family needs assistance in any form—whether related to transportation, meals, or other school-related concerns—please do not hesitate to contact the school or district. We are here to support you as we move forward together.

Thank you for your patience, resilience, and cooperation as we navigate these challenges. We are looking forward to continuing to work together.

Sincerely,

Crissie Stapleton

Dr. Crissie Stapleton
Superintendent, Barnwell County School District