

Dear Incoming 6th Grade Families,

Today, we are writing to you with important information regarding the upcoming school year and a change to a long-standing tradition for our 6th-grade students at Rocky Top Middle School (RTMS). After careful consideration and deep regret, we must inform you that we will discontinue the Camp Grizz outdoor education program for the foreseeable future.

We realize that Camp Grizz has been a cherished and long-term tradition for 6th-grade students who attend RTMS, providing unique opportunities for learning, personal growth, and building connections. We understand that it has become an anticipated and valued part of the middle school experience, offering hands-on learning in science and social studies, fostering essential social-emotional learning skills, and creating a strong sense of community among our students. Activities like exploring kinetic energy through archery, investigating environmental impact, practicing orienteering, and navigating the ropes course have undoubtedly positively impacted our students over the years.

This difficult decision directly results from the significant budget challenges our district is currently facing. As Superintendent Gdowski recently shared, these reductions are prompted by several converging factors:

- **Anticipated enrollment reductions for next year:** A decrease in the number of students enrolling in our schools directly impacts the funding we receive.
- **A change in the state's funding formula:** This change disproportionately affects districts like ours that are experiencing declining enrollment. Unfortunately, roughly 80 percent of Colorado's school districts are facing this same challenge.
- **Cost increases for utilities, health insurance, and technology:** The rising costs of essential operational needs further strain our limited resources.
- **The district's status as the 14th-lowest funded school district out of 15 in the metro area:** We receive significantly less supplemental funding through voter-approved mill levy overrides compared to most of our neighboring districts.

These financial pressures necessitate difficult choices across the district, impacting various programs and staffing levels. The discontinuation of Camp Grizz is one of the many challenging decisions we have had to make to ensure the financial stability of our district and to continue providing the best possible education for all our students within our limited resources. The program currently costs \$365 per student to attend. In our commitment to ensuring all students have access to this experience, our school has historically allocated approximately \$30,000 from our school budget each year to cover the cost for students who qualify for free or reduced lunch. Eliminating this program, while deeply regrettable, allows us to redirect these limited funds to support other essential student needs and maintain core educational services in the face of district-wide budget reductions.

We recognize the immense value of programs like Camp Grizz, which extend learning beyond the classroom and foster crucial social and emotional development. However, the current financial realities leave us with very few alternatives.

Superintendent Gdowski has emphasized that these cuts do not reflect "waste and inefficiency" within our district. In fact, Adams 12 Five Star Schools operates with one of the lowest rates of administration spending in the state and country. The core issue lies in the significant underfunding of K-12 education in Colorado, where studies indicate a multi-billion dollar gap in what is needed to support our students adequately.

We understand that this news will be disappointing, especially given Camp Grizz's long history as a cornerstone of the 6th-grade experience at RTMS. We share your disappointment. We are committed to finding alternative ways to foster the academic, social, and emotional growth of our 6th-grade students within the constraints of our budget. Your child's school will be working diligently to provide enriching learning experiences throughout the year.

We appreciate your understanding and continued support as we navigate these challenging times. We remain dedicated to providing a quality education for all our students and will continue to advocate for adequate funding for our schools at the state level.

Sincerely,

LaShauna Quarles, Principal Rocky Top M.S.