

News & Insights

Ashley Warshell for The Journal Record, Virtual Learning is Not a Solution - It's a Setback

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<https://journalrecord.com/2025/05/14/virtual-learning-days-fail-working-families/>

As a working mother, I've learned to juggle a lot. But what I—and countless other parents—shouldn't continue to juggle are the so-called "virtual learning days" that school districts now treat as a routine fallback. Whether it's for weather, staffing shortages, or professional development, remote days have become a normalized part of school calendars. It's time we stop pretending this is acceptable.

Virtual learning is not learning. We saw that clearly during the pandemic, when months of remote instruction led to devastating declines in student achievement. The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), a federal assessment of educational achievement of U.S. students, shows that the pandemic effectively erased 20 years of academic progress; and according to the most recent report released January 29, 2025, scores continue to stagnate. A recent analysis in *The Economist* emphasizes that states with longer school closures saw especially steep drops in math performance, along with sustained disengagement among students ("The Pandemic Hit Pupils Hardest in America's Democrat-Leaning States", *The Economist*, 17 Mar. 2025, <https://www.economist.com/united-states/2025/03/17/the-pandemic-hit-pupils-hardest-in-americas-democrat-leaning-states>).

Bringing back virtual learning days as a routine part of the school calendar ignores everything we've learned. During the pandemic, virtual instruction was a necessary emergency response—but the data now makes clear it came at a steep cost. Students in states that kept schools remote longer have experienced some of the worst academic declines in the country. Remote days disrupted routines, weakened engagement, and sent a message that school was optional. Normalizing that model—even for weather or convenience—risks further entrenching those patterns. Virtual learning should remain what it was meant to be: a last resort, not a fallback.

But the academic toll is only part of the story. The burden that virtual days place on working families—especially working mothers—is immense. We're expected to rearrange our jobs, find last-minute childcare, and somehow supervise our children's education—all with minimal notice. For many, that's simply not possible. The result is stress, lost income, and a growing sense that the system no longer works for

those of us trying to hold everything together.

What message are we sending when schools treat virtual days as an easy fix? That student learning is secondary to adult convenience? That families can endlessly absorb the disruptions? That moms will just keep picking up the slack?

We've done our part. We were there during the shutdowns, making it work however we could. But we can't—and shouldn't be expected to—keep functioning in crisis mode forever. If the pandemic taught us anything, it's that in-person learning is irreplaceable—for academic success and household stability.

Virtual learning should be an emergency option, not a go-to solution. Our kids deserve better. So do their parents.

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