



OKLAHOMA STATE
DEPARTMENT of EDUCATION

The Oklahoma State Department of Education requests a waiver from the 95% testing requirement for Sulphur Public Schools and Barnsdall Public Schools due to the impact of severe weather conditions this spring.

Spring 2024 was particularly harsh in Oklahoma. Typically, springtime in Oklahoma brings an average of forty tornadoes from March to May. However, during that same time frame this year, Oklahoma recorded 104 tornadoes, including several particularly intense tornadoes. One of the most notable outbreaks occurred on April 27, 2024, when the state recorded thirty-two tornadoes plus an additional four in the early morning hours of April 28. This outbreak included two EF 3 tornadoes, one of which struck Sulphur, Oklahoma. The city of Barnsdall was particularly hit hard this spring, experiencing an EF 1 tornado on April 1 and an EF 4 tornado on May 6.

As you can imagine, the Oklahoma Governor declared a State of Emergency and activated the State Emergency Operations Plan as well as numerous resources of state agencies to provide assistance. Murray and Osage counties, plus several other counties, have been included in Oklahoma's Federal Disaster Declaration. FEMA assistance is available in these areas, and there have been many involved in the efforts to restore power. Several organizations are providing disaster relief, and the Oklahoma State Department of Education (OSDE) reached out to assess the needs of school districts in affected regions.

The damage in Sulphur was extensive, as wind speeds were estimated to reach up to 165 miles an hour. Much of the city, including part of the downtown area was completely wiped out. One death, plus many injuries, was reported. Sulphur High School sustained structural damage, and Sulphur Public Schools' bus fleet was destroyed. The first few days after the storm were devoted to search and rescue. Sulphur Public Schools was closed from the following Monday, April 29, to Monday, May 6. They finally reopened on May 7 with buses loaned from Oklahoma City Public Schools.

Sulphur Public Schools did complete Grade 11 testing, as well as much of Grade 3 and 4 testing. However, Grades 5-8 ELA and Math, plus Grades 5 and 8 Science were not administered. The district and SDE did visit about the possibility of administering exams once the district was able to reopen. However, the health and safety of their students was the primary focus once they reopened, which was the final week before dismissing for the summer. During that week, they focused on assessing how many students were dislocated, determining needs for students and their families, distributing food and other necessary items, and informing the community about available assistance.

Barnsdall was hit by an EF-4 tornado so large that it left a scar on the earth that could be seen by satellites. The path was estimated to be over thirty-nine miles long and almost a mile wide at one point. Barnsdall, a small town with a population of approximately 1,400, was impacted with forty homes damaged, eight

injuries, and two deaths. The town's infrastructure, especially utilities, was destroyed. What is most disturbing is that this was the second tornado to hit Barnsdall this spring.

Barnsdall Public Schools, luckily, was largely unscathed by the tornado. However, every building in the district was utilized to provide services to the community: housing FEMA, serving as headquarters for the utility workers, or warehousing food and supplies for residents. Classes were cancelled for the rest of the year. The only assessments unfinished in Barnsdall Public Schools were Grades 5 & 8 Science. Grade 8 Science was started, but they were unable to complete the assessments due to the severity of the tornado, the impact it had on the town's infrastructure, and the early end to the school year (no classes were held after the second tornado hit on May 6).

After districts were impacted by the storms, the Oklahoma State Department of Education (OSDE) directly reached out to the superintendents at each district, indicating a willingness to assist in whatever ways possible. Not surprisingly, the greatest worry immediately afterward was for the well-being of students, their families, and the community. OSDE offered assistance for meals, mental health resources, substitute teachers, transportation, school calendar waivers, and options for testing, such as paper testing or testing at different sites nearby, etc.

OSDE's biggest concerns are that Sulphur was not able to finish testing in Grades 5-8, and Barnsdall was not able to finish testing in Grades 5 & 8 Science. It should be noted that many other school districts were impacted by the severe storms that swept through the state in April and May. The majority, including Marietta, Plainview, Ardmore, Morris, Cordell, and Welch, were able to complete required testing.

OSDE requests a waiver from the 95% testing requirement for just two districts from the dozens that were impacted this spring.