

## **Consideration and decision-making process to close schools during winter weather**

With the leaves falling off the trees and the Thanksgiving holiday quickly approaching, so are signs that cold weather is arriving and with it, the possibility of inclement weather.

Although I enjoy the changing seasons, as a school superintendent having to make a decision whether or not to close schools is never easy. The reason is simply no matter what the decision may be, there will always be disagreements. Regardless, these decisions must be made to ensure our students and staff are safe.

At the possibility of any bad weather, we watch the weather forecasts throughout the night and early morning. I am in contact with our Director of Buildings and Grounds who is also in contact with the transportation department, local law enforcement, and city officials as needed. Other metro-area superintendents and I are in constant communications to share information and, in many cases, reach a joint decision.

Temperatures, wind chills, amounts of snow, and visibility are all considered when determining whether or not to have school. There are often two different weather-related decisions to make: One involves heavy snowfall, while the other, wind and frigid temperatures. During this time, roads are driven and we discuss the status of the weather and conditions across the school district (a 40 mile area). Any communication and updates I can provide to others will also take place during this time.

In response to snow-related issues, the determining factor is the ability for city and county workers to plow and clear roads. Because roads are plowed throughout the night and early morning hours, this decision will most commonly be made in the early hours based on conditions at the time and the forecast for the hours when students and staff will be getting to school. We are also mindful of the rural areas our district covers, as well as traffic in the main part of the city.

For cold and frigid temperatures, we try our best to make a decision the evening before. Typically if the National Weather Service forecast for 6 a.m. calls for air temperatures of 25 degrees below zero or colder, or if the forecast wind chill is minus 40 or worse, classes and activities will be considered for cancellation. If this threshold is not met, we will continue to monitor conditions and make any needed decisions into the next morning. There is no exact science to these predictions and decisions.

Once a decision is made to close or alter the school day, all of our students' families will receive an automated phone message and email. A notification will also be sent via the mobile application. This message will be sent as soon as possible following a decision. **To prepare for any inclement weather, the district will be doing a test of its notification systems on Monday, November 23 at 3 p.m. Calls and emails will go to the contacts associated with each child in the district.**

### **Developmental Kindergarten**

In the event school is delayed one hour in the morning, developmental kindergarten will still be held. If we have a two-hour delay, there will be no morning developmental kindergarten. If a decision to let out school early is made before afternoon developmental kindergarten starts,

they will not have class. Otherwise, cancellation and dismissal decisions will be the same time as other schools.

### **School Activities and Athletics**

The decision to hold practices will be made on a case-by-case basis. This information will be sent out from the activities office.

### **Community Education Programs**

Preschool, Kids Connection and other Community Education programs have varying ways of handling late starts, early dismissals, and no school days due to weather. Preschool teachers and KTC staff will provide information to parents of children enrolled in those programs about how those changes are handled.

SAS, Aquatics, Recreation/Enrichment classes, and rentals are canceled if school is dismissed early or not held at all. A weather hotline is available at 252-8488 for cancellation announcements for CE.

You may also contact the CE office at 278-0552 for additional information or look online at [www.johnstonCE.org](http://www.johnstonCE.org) and the inclement weather procedures link.

More information about school closing, delays and early release days can be found on our website ([www.johnston.k12.ia.us](http://www.johnston.k12.ia.us) under the Parent tab, Resources section, "Inclement Weather").

School closing information will also be available via any of the local television stations, the Des Moines Register website, and local radio stations. Information will also be posted on our district website, mobile app, district Facebook page, and Twitter accounts @JohnstonCSD or @CoreyLunn1.

Aside from all these steps and precautions, ultimately it is parents that have the best information regarding the road conditions at their home, and the final choice to send a child to school during inclement weather. With this in mind, our parents always have the choice during inclement weather to keep their children at home. There will be no school penalty and/or consequences for this choice. We only ask that parents make sure to communicate their choice with their children's school.

The upcoming winter season can be an enjoyable and joyous time of the year. It can also be a time of bad weather and reason for caution. We will continue to do all we can to make the best decisions for the safety of all our students, families and staff across the Johnston area.

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