

## **“SNOW DAYS”**

Greg Mann, USD 320 Interim Superintendent

The cooler days and colder nights remind us that winter weather will soon be upon us and with it, inclement weather. We fully understand that the decision to open or close schools in bad weather has a big effect on our families. We also understand that our students are better served both academically and socially by being in school, BUT our top priority is always the safety of our students and staff.

**HOW DO WE MAKE SNOW DAY DECISIONS?** The decision to open or close the schools during inclement weather is based upon several relevant factors, among them:

**1. Information on road conditions from transportation staff and law enforcement.**

We must carefully consider the most dangerous roads in the district. Even if the streets or roads in your area look clear, travel elsewhere in the district may be dangerous.

Also, we consider that almost EVERY person who comes to school, whether student or staff, is either a driver or a passenger. Almost all arrive either on a bus or in a private passenger vehicle.

**2. The amount of snow (and/or ice) that has accumulated, whether precipitation is continuing, and WIND conditions.**

Two or three inches of snow falling straight down is a much different consideration than is the same amount of snow blowing sideways. Too, even a small amount of accumulating ice is a much different consideration than a few inches of snow.

**3. Building conditions** (such as whether we have electricity and heat).

**4. Hard Surface conditions.**

Can we clear our parking lot and sidewalks in time for school to start? Maintenance personnel who are responsible for clearing and treating school parking lots and sidewalks are consulted.

**5. Temperature and wind chill.**

**6. Weather predictions.**

We prefer to not make our decision based on weather predictions, as they are not always accurate. Therefore, we prefer to make the decision in the early morning when weather models and conditions give a much more accurate picture of what is going on or can be expected. However, there are times when the predictions (and conditions!) are so overwhelming and confident that a decision will be made the night before

**7. What other school districts are doing.**

Contact with other local districts is made and we share information on weather conditions and whether they are opening or closing.

**WHO MAKES THE DECISION?** The superintendent of schools is ultimately responsible for the decision, based on the above factors and the recommendations of our Transportation Director and Director of Maintenance.

**HOW IS THE DECISION ADVERTISED?** We utilize our messaging service which sends out text messages and email messages. The information is also posted on our Facebook Page and on the District website at [www.usd320.com](http://www.usd320.com). The following media outlets are also contacted to announce a closing:

Television Stations: WIBW, KSNT, KTKA & KTMJ.

Radio Stations: FM stations 89.5, 93.3, 93.7, 94.5, 96.3, 99.3, 100.3, 101.5, 102.9, 104.9, 106.9  
AM stations 580, 1350, 1420

**WILL WE CHANGE OUR MIND?** Even if weather conditions worsen (or get better), it is extremely difficult and DANGEROUS to reverse our decision in the morning. Once we make the decision to open the schools and advertise it, many parents rely on it and leave for work. If we then send students right back home, many will return to unsupervised, empty houses. If conditions get worse during the school day, we may need to have an early dismissal, but we will attempt to give adequate notice to parents first.

**IF SCHOOL IS CALLED OFF, WILL EVENING ACTIVITIES ALSO BE CALLED OFF?** We know in Kansas weather conditions can change rapidly; whiteout conditions in the morning can turn into a sun shiny day in the afternoon. Therefore, calling off school does not automatically mean that evening activities are called off. The same consideration as are used to determine whether or not to open school are used to determine whether or not scheduled evening activities will be held.

**IF SCHOOL IS CALLED OFF, WILL SCHOOL MEALS BE AVAILABLE?** In most cases, no. The kitchen staff has to report between 5:30 a.m. and 6:00 a.m. to begin meal preparations. They have to start this early to be able to have breakfast and lunch ready in time to serve. It would be too unsafe for them to report to work during inclement weather that forces a school closure.

**WILL SCHOOL EVER START LATE?** Our preference is always to either have a “normal” day of school or no school at all. We do have the authority to call for a late start. A late start will be always be two hours late; therefore everything is two hours later than normal: bus routes start two hours later, pick-ups will at least two hours later, etc. But lunch will be served as close to the normal time as is possible time and school will still dismiss at the normal time.

Late starts will be used infrequently and only when we are EXTREMELY confident that conditions will improve substantially before 8:00 a.m.

Although we do the best we can, we know that most times there is not a perfect decision. **If you do not feel as though it is safe for your child to attend school, practice, or a scheduled activity, use your best judgment on whether your child(ren) should attend. Just call into school or contact the coach or sponsor as you would if your student were sick.**

We hope that this explanation helps everyone understand the process and factors we consider when making the best possible decision for the safety of all students & employees in our district.