

CPS Families,

While my hope is that today's weather is just a short cold spell, it seems like a good time to communicate about Snow Day Decision-Making. There are always mixed feelings regarding snow days, from the students that are excited to have a free vacation day, to the parents that have to scramble for child care.

Snow days are not called on a whim, as there are a lot of moving parts and questions that are related to that decision. Annually, I try to put out information regarding Snow Day decisions, so that our community understands how the decision is made and what has to be considered regarding our snow days. Below are the frequently asked questions!

Who makes the decision?

Not to displace blame, but it is a group decision. First, there is a group of local superintendents that text message each other starting at 4:00 am, trying to assess the transportation concern.

Why do they need to be involved?

Because we share students, sporting events, and travel concerns. If our neighbor is closing, we will consider that as more of a possibility that we may need to close. At the same time, we have another group communicating within our district: transportation, maintenance, and central office. We have staff actively driving the roads, walking the district, and checking in about the conditions.

How do we make the decision?

We have to consider multiple considerations, like temperature, ice, snow amount, wind chill, etc. We have to look at walking conditions for our students that live in town. Road conditions for our buses, not only within the district, but the buses that go to LCC for our High School students. Future forecasts, to see if conditions are worsening for the afternoon commute. Wind chill, for the students that stand at bus stops, or walk to school. We look at weather service and news reports on the conditions. There are so many considerations, that I cannot even list them all in one article. No one wants to make the call incorrectly, and opinions on what is safe vary widely.

Why not err on the side of caution and just call school off if there is any concern?

The answer to that has many factors as well. First, snow days are missed educational opportunities. We want students to learn, and they have to be in school to do that. Also, we have state requirements on how many days we need to be in school (180) and if we don't reach that number, we have to make them up in June. This cuts into family vacation times, and causes a lot of frustration for planning. We are forgiven by the state 6 days a year, but winter is long, and we also have to anticipate other causes for school closings, like power outages,

flu outbreaks, heating concerns, etc. Also, for working parents, when closings are excessive, child care is an issue.

Why not have school and then close early if there is an issue?

Early dismissals are very problematic for districts. Timing for transportation takes a lot of time, when you have two different shifts for K-6 and 7-12. However, the main problem is child supervision. If we announce school is closing early, parents have to compete with the buses to get home before their children, while facing the same poor road conditions. We can't let a kindergartner go into an empty home, and parents may not be able to get there in time.

Why did they close/not close? It's fine/terrible near me?

This is the hardest part to answer, as one family can walk out and feel that the roads are fine by them, and others think it is awful. Charlotte is a largely spread-out district, with rural homes as well as in-town residents. We may have to make the call to close because we can't get down country roads to get some of our students to school. Or, roads could be fine, but the wind chill for walkers could be unsafe for children. Also, to be blunt, we could have made a bad call. To be sure that buses are on the roads in time to pick up students, we may have had to make the call according to the information we had at 5:00 am, and suddenly the weather clears or gets worse. Michigan weather changes on a dime, and it can go from rain to ice in minutes.

Why not just make the call the night before, so everyone can plan?

Good question, and as a working parent, I would love to have a clear weather report that would allow for that decision. Michigan weather is changeable at best. So typically, we are looking at the weather from the afternoon of the prior day, into the wee early morning to make the most accurate call.

How do I find out about school closings?

We communicate in multiple ways about school closing information. Local news stations, radio, school website/social media, and Parent Square are also useful for communication. Please do not call local buildings or transportation for information, as they may not be in the office at that time, and they are not the staff that make those decisions. But look for emails/calls, and check our website for information.

Lastly, keep in mind that as a parent, you make the ultimate safety considerations for your children. If you think it is unsafe, you can keep your student home. If you think your student shouldn't be walking or driving, you can transport them. Those personal parent decisions also are a factor in our decisions for the district. If we don't have 75% of students attending school during any particular day, we cannot count it towards our 180 required school days and we will have to make up that day in June.

At Charlotte Public Schools, we want to keep every student as safe as possible, and while you may not always agree with the decisions related to school cancellations, the decisions are not made lightly, and there are several moving factors that contribute to the cancellation of school. As we move through the winter season, we all want our staff and students to be safe and warm!

Go Orioles, Oriole Pride!

Dr. Mandy Stewart - CPS Superintendent