

Safety First: Winter Weather School Decisions



As I am writing this article, I am looking out my office windows at a beautiful, mild, sunny November morning. I find it hard to imagine that our Minnesota winter weather is right around the corner. The extended summer and fall has been a wonderful bonus to an excellent start to this school year, but it won't be long until we see sub-zero temps and snow-

storms.

Each year, one of the most common questions asked is how we make decisions to have late starts or closings due to inclement weather. While this is not always an easy decision to make, I want to ensure you that the safety of our students and staff is our first concern when deciding to delay or close school for the day. Education World, an administrative publication, interviewed a number of Superintendents to gain suggestions for making these difficult decisions.

They stated that the most important thing is having a plan, communicating that plan, being connected with other districts in the region, and relying on the basic principles of safety. The Upsala Area School District's plan includes these steps and the purpose of this article is to communicate our plan with our families and community members.

The decision to close, or start late, begins at the moment there is a predicted storm or prior to 5:00 am on the morning of the storm. I begin gathering information about the weather and road conditions from various sources, such as the Minnesota Department of Transportation, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), area Superintendents, as well as consulting with our head custodian and some of our transportation staff. I also will get out and drive the roads myself to gauge the conditions.

Even with all this information,

the decision to close or delay is still a very difficult one to make and I am certain there will be times when others will disagree with my decision. I cannot guarantee that I will make the correct decision every time, but I will guarantee that the decision to close or delay school will be in the interests of the safety of our students and staff. I will also make every effort to do so in a timely fashion that will minimize any disruptions to the schedules of our families. Depending on the snowfall and

current conditions, and how soon plows may be on the roads, I will attempt to make this decision by 5:45 am at the latest.

Once a decision has been made to close, start late, or close early; communicating this decision to parents and staff is critical. Upsala Area Schools uses a variety of media to disseminate these decisions, including social media and news outlets. The quickest way to receive updates regarding school closing decisions is the REMIND system. This system allows you to receive messages directly by text message or email. The REMIND system ensures that you will receive messages as soon as they are posted. You may sign up for this system by texting @upsa to 81010 or by sending an email to upsala@remind.com. We will also post the message on other social media including Twitter, Facebook, and the District's website. In addition, we will post announcements on the following news media outlets: WYRQ, KLTF, and KFML Radio - Little Falls; WCCO & WCCO Radio 830 - Minneapolis; KASM Radio - Albany; KCLD, KZPK, and KCML - St. Cloud; KSTP & KSAX -

Alexandria; KMSP Fox 9; KEYL Radio - Long Prairie; SC Times Website; and KARE 11. When we communicate the decision to close, start late, or close early; we will attempt to include all the details for parents, students, and staff. Please understand that the media outlets may not include all the details when they distribute the announcement. In the event that we close school for the day, or if we close early, due to severe weather, all extra-curricular and after school activities will also be cancelled or postponed.

In addition, we encourage all families to have their own plan for school closings or delays. Communicate this plan with your children. Being prepared is the best possible way to avoid potential problems in the event that any type of school closing occurs, as this is bound to happen.

Finally, we ask that all community members be more safety conscious at bus stops and when driving near school. Keeping our students safe as they go to and from school is a collective effort and

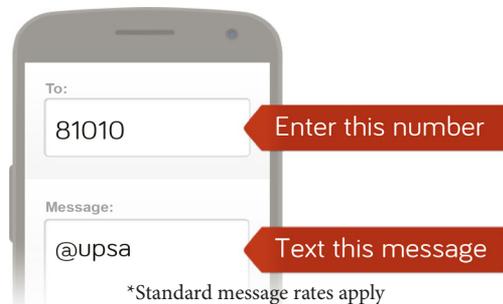
on slippery roads that means slowing down and being aware. As always, if you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me at 573-2174 or vcapelle@upsala.k12.mn.us.

Thanks for your support.

Mr. Vern Capelle

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