Superintendent's Message
Closing or Delaying School for Inclement Weather- A Most Challenging Decision

Among my most challenging responsibilities as Superintendent of Schools is making the decision regarding school delays or cancellations. And yet, given the geographical location of our school district, inclement, wintry weather will always be a seasonal challenge.

Because it is getting to be that time of year again, I want to share a few thoughts about the process that is utilized in making inclement weather decisions in Parkland. Hopefully, this information will demystify the process and minimize the frustration associated with not knowing how decisions are made.

In much the same manner as everyone else, we learn about approaching weather conditions from television, radio and computer reports. Once the weather alert occurs, our Transportation and School Services Departments begin to make preparations.

If the weather front is occurring in the evening or overnight, Transportation will have a couple of drivers out at about 4:00 a.m. First they will check those roads that are typically most problematic. As you know, from north to south, our school district spans 75 square miles and varies greatly in road and weather conditions. At the same time, we will be speaking with the municipalities and PennDOT about plowing/cindering/salting schedules. We also speak to key personnel in surrounding school districts to ascertain any information that may be helpful.

Typically, by 5:00 a.m., we will have gathered all of the most current information that is available. This information is coupled with our knowledge of Parkland School District demographics:

- Weather conditions vary greatly across the district
- We have in excess of 1,000 bus stops
- Our buses will travel in excess of 8,000 miles during a school day
- We transport approximately 10,000 students per day
- Our buses will be operating within the typical traffic flow
- Many of our bus stops may be affected by snow plowing
- Our Grounds Department will need time to plow parking lots and clear walkways

Based upon all the data and knowledge we have about our weather conditions and demographics, I typically make a decision by 5:30 a.m. Once I make this decision regarding a delay or cancellation, I start to make the necessary contacts. The radio and television stations are notified and key personnel are called. We will also be utilizing our rapid notification system so staff and parents will receive a personal phone call, email and/or text message designated for this purpose. If your contact information has changed, please notify the school office as soon as possible. The message is also posted on our district web site at www.parklandsd.org.

On most of these occasions we will make ONE decision early in the morning- to close or delay- and that will be final for the day. We believe this is easier for most parents as you make plans for the day. Once in a great while the timing of a weather event is such that buying a little extra time with a delay MIGHT allow us to safely open school. In these rare events, the message will state that we will provide an update by a certain time. The same means of communication will be used to provide an update when necessary.

Please remember- it is the responsibility of parents / guardians to make arrangements for the care of your children in the event that we need to close or delay our schools for weather or any other potential emergency situation.

This information is being shared to provide you with some insight into what happens behind the scenes during bad weather events in Parkland. Please know that student safety is the central focus of this exercise. Entrusted with the safety of approximately 10,000 students, we will always err on the side of caution in making weather-related decisions; no decision is more important.

THANK YOU FOR YOUR COOPERATION AND UNDERSTANDING! Let's hope for a mild winter and an early spring!

Richard T. Sniscak
Superintendent of Schools