



Willmar Public Schools

Dr. Jeffrey Holm, Superintendent

Inspiring and preparing all learners for their future in our community and our world

February 14, 2019

Hello,

A difficult responsibility I have is making decisions about whether or not to cancel school, delay starting school, or dismissing school early due to poor weather conditions. I want to assure you that the highest priority in these situations is the safety and well-being of students and staff. Having explained that, I would also like to point out that it's not always clear that canceling, delaying, or dismissing school early is automatically safest for everyone. I am aware that there are many parents who experience significant hardships when school schedules change, especially when working parents still have to report to their workplace on time. For some students, being in school is safer than being home with limited supervision, or in the case of our older students, taking to the roads in their own vehicles to go to the mall or to friends' homes. Furthermore, we have a finite number of hours to provide learning opportunities to students, when we disrupt our schedule there is a loss of learning that is difficult to recover. I want to assure everyone that funding is never considered at all when I'm assessing the weather conditions and making this decision.

When the weather is questionable, I am constantly monitoring information from the National Weather Service, which includes web-based live meetings as early as 3:30 AM. I also confer with our transportation providers. Often times, I will go out and drive on rural roads in our District to assess the nature of road conditions. I also communicate with colleagues in neighboring school districts, to get their perspective on the conditions. We rarely have a situation where the decision is clear-cut and a no brainer.

When we do change our schedule, due to weather, we utilize a system called Infinite Campus Messenger, which makes calls to parents about changes. If parents have provided a current phone number, they receive a recorded call that warns them about the change in schedule. Sometimes parents receive messages very early, which I understand is not ideal, but I typically want to give them as much notice as possible to provide them time to make a plan to deal with the change in schedule. Our weather-related school announcements can be heard on local radio stations, or viewed on all the major Twin Cities television stations, our web page, and our Twitter and Facebook feeds.

Finally, I would like to address making-up lost days. When we establish our annual calendar, we consult with faculty members and the School Board approves the calendar in which we designate certain days, like Presidents' Day, as potential make-up days. We do so, because we believe that we can recapture lost instructional. We don't typically spontaneously decide to make days up that haven't been previously designated as make-up days. For example, we don't have plans to make-up days up during our spring break, because we like to give students and parents the assurance that they can plan activities without the worry of having to attend school on those days. I'm aware that many people believe that during our recent outbreak of cold weather, Governor Walz said schools don't have to make-up days. The Governor's Office issued a statement saying, "he assured schools they will not be penalized for keeping students safe." This doesn't mean that we aren't required to implement our predetermined plan to make up for lost time. The School Board will make a determination about whether the additional lost days are made-up or not.

Please know that I make decisions in the best interests of our students, their parents, and our staff. I do so using the best information available to me at the time the decision needs to be made. Thank you for your patience with the difficult weather situations we have encountered this winter.

Sincerely,

Dr. Jeffrey Holm, Superintendent