

THE TOUGHEST DECISIONS

Having served as a school administrator for twenty-one years, there have been a lot of tough decisions that I have had to make during that span of time. Some have involved suspensions or expulsions. Some have been related to purchasing textbooks and materials. Some have had to do with staffing issues, and even negotiations with our employee groups. However, I believe that I can speak for a lot of my fellow administrators when I share with you that decisions to delay the opening of schools, or early dismissals, or closing of schools altogether represent some of the toughest decisions.

Making decisions that altar the school day, or even eliminate it altogether, are not as simple as black and white. The safety of all involved is always of primary importance. As an example, some might wonder why we were closed on February 5th and 6th. First of all, the temperatures ranged from 5-10 degrees below zero on February 5th. A good deal of our area also received about a quarter of an inch of snow overnight before dawn. It is unfortunate, but not all children have gloves to put on their hands or head coverings to wear while waiting at the bus stop. It was a tough call, but it was made in the interest of safety. Sometimes, you will have snow or ice in one part of the district, but the rest of the district is fine. At other times, the roads may be fine at 5:00 a.m., but snow begins falling after some buses have already started their routes.

Tuesday, February 6th, presented yet another dilemma. We were already on a 90-minute delay due to the extreme cold. Couple this issue with the inconsistent weather predictions on just what time the snow was expected to start falling and you almost feel like pulling your hair out! Even if the snow were to hold off until 3:00 p.m., it could present some transportation problems for us because of the cold temperatures. You may have heard about the stranded school buses in

Cincinnati. Therefore, if you started the school day on a 90-minute delay, and had to dismiss earlier than 2:50 p.m., you have not used the taxpayers' dollars wisely. Plus, it won't even count as a full day of school. I noticed that many school districts changed from a "delay" status to "closed" on both February 5th and 6th. When it comes to these tough calls, misery loves company. You can tell this by the list of school closings that scroll at the bottom of the TV screen. Following a snowstorm such as the one we experienced on February 6th, the state and county roads rarely present a big problem. Those agencies have the equipment, manpower, and resources to deal with the situation in a relatively short period of time. However, townships are usually limited in equipment, manpower, and resources. And, as you know, we have quite a number of township roads to travel in our school district.

I realize that everyone has a routine, and that school closings and delays cause a lot of frustration for many people. I also realize that most students want to be in school. They want to learn. They anticipate the annual achievement tests, and they want to do well. Also, many students look forward to the nutritious meals they receive through breakfast and lunch each day. It's a tough decision when you know that so many people or situations hinge on your decision about closing school. Early dismissals may be the toughest decisions of all. It causes total chaos at school, and the concern is always present that a child may go home to an empty house. Worse yet, the child may be locked out of the house and in the cold. Though schools do their best to make sure that something like this doesn't occur, occasionally it does happen.

Lastly, I can assure you that these decisions always focus on the overall safety aspect for all involved---students, parents, staff, and others. Many, many thanks to our road crews from the township, county, and state levels. Your efforts are invaluable in this entire process, and are

often overlooked or taken for granted. Remember, there is still plenty of winter left for us to get through. So, don't make those late May/early June vacation plans just yet.

SCHOOL CALENDAR REVISIONS

The Ohio Department of Education establishes within the school calendar up to five calamity days that do not have to be made up if used. However, once you get beyond that fifth calamity day, you are required by law to make up those additional missed days beyond number five. We have now missed eight days for snow/ice/frigid temperatures. In addition to this, Peebles Elementary was closed an additional day due to lack of heat.

Thursday, April 5th, was to have been the first day of Spring Break for students and staff. Due to schools being forced to close on Thursday, February 8th, April 5th will now be a day of school to make up for that closure. Monday, April 9th, was to have also been a day of our Spring Break. However, due to the closure of schools on February 13th, April 9th will now be a day of school to make up for that closure. As of now, the closure on Wednesday, February 14th will be made up on Tuesday, May 29th. Any additional days of school that need to be made up due to snow, ice, lack of heat, or any other calamity will be done beginning with Wednesday, May 30th, and however many days may be needed thereafter. As an example, Peebles Elementary has one additional day of school to be made up due to being closed down for a lack of heat in the building. If there are no further closures for the District this winter, that extra day for Peebles Elementary would be made up on Wednesday, May 30th.

It is possible that this make-up schedule could change due to the fact that the severe winter weather has been a problem for schools statewide during February. Many districts have already exceeded the limit of five calamity days. However, until further notice, this would be our plan.

SCHEDULE CHANGE

Due to all of the snow days and delayed starting times during the month of February, the early dismissal day that was originally planned for March 8, 2007, has been postponed. Thus, **school will be IN SESSION THE FULL DAY on Thursday, March 8th.** Another early dismissal day may be planned for later in March or early April for staff development.

As always, if you have any questions about this article, please feel free to contact me at 544-5586.

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