



New Berlin CUSD #16



From the Desk of the Superintendent

January 23, 2023

To cancel school or not?

I am hoping that we don't have to use any emergency days. However, in being realistic we will. In order to not risk going above the required days and looking at past history of the district's emergency days and the fact that we are 152-square miles that make up our district boundaries, it makes sense to use traditional "snow days" until there is a change at the state level on not having to use Emergency days before Act of God days. There will be no meals provided to students for school being cancelled. Please be aware that other school superintendents may make the choice to utilize e-Learning days based on their district make-up and history of using emergency days. If we have to utilize all five (5) emergency days, the school year will end June 2, 2023. Let's hope that we don't have to do this!

Cancelling school is one of the more complex decisions a Superintendent must make. The decision to delay, dismiss early, or close schools due to inclement weather has an enormous effect on all of our families. The following information may help you understand the process that is used when making this critical decision.

When inclement weather impacts the District, the decision to dismiss, delay or close schools based upon a careful analysis of the following factors:

- By driving some of our roads and assessing key roads/intersections that our buses need to navigate.
- By assessing the available information on road conditions from law enforcement, our Transportation Director, and local road commissioners.
- By assessing the amount of accumulated snow and/or ice, or the density of the fog.
- By assessing the visibility.
- By determining whether or not the precipitation/fog is predicted to continue throughout the day.
- By assessing the temperature and wind chill.
- By determining the impact on our transportation (buses).
- By examining weather predictions from satellite systems, local radar and the National Weather Service.
- By assessing the timing of the storm/fog.
- By holding discussions with area Superintendents beginning the prior evening and continuing again around 4:00 am

There may be times that you believe we should have cancelled school or when you believe school should have been in session. Our District, which is over 152 square miles, consists of portions of Morgan County on our Western part. It also reaches past the AMC Movie Theater in Springfield on the Eastern part. The geographical make-up for portions of our District vary and the fact that we have an interstate highway that is utilized by the District makes it very difficult to determine when it is safe for school to be in session. For example, if you live in Loami, conditions might be fine but in New Berlin the conditions could be terrible or vice versa. The final decision on whether to cancel school or not is based upon the overall condition of the District and the safety of all of our children. Furthermore, we meet with the road commissioners every November to touch base with the process of needing input on inclement weather days, their concerns and challenges, as well as an update on their resources.

Who makes the decision on whether to delay, dismiss early or cancel school? As the Superintendent, I am tasked with this complex responsibility.

When is the decision made? I will make every attempt to cancel school by 6:30 am or the previous night or day, so we can initiate the automated call system, notify local radio stations, and notify TV stations. If a school day is delayed or dismissed early, the same contacts will be notified.

Will we close school if conditions worsen (early dismissal)? If weather conditions worsen, I will be reluctant to dismiss early. If I send students (especially younger students) back home, some will return to empty houses. Once students arrive at school, I feel that most of the time the safest plan is to keep them at school until the end of the day. However, there may be a time we will dismiss early, in order to get students home before a storm worsens. I am hoping this will be a rare occasion. If this does happen, we will utilize the automated call system immediately to notify parents.

What if I feel it is not safe to send my child to school? Please call the respective school office and report their absence.

What time can I drop my child off at school if I decide to drive them? All attendance centers are open at 7:35 am.

Any other suggestions for preparing my child for winter weather? Please ensure that your child/ren have appropriate attire for the weather. This includes a coat, gloves, hat, etc. I know that the older students don't like this, but it is for their safety. It may take a while before a spare bus with an extra driver can get there. If your child is driving their own vehicle, please insist that they have those items in their vehicles at the very least.

Any other suggestions for preparing my child in the event school is cancelled during the school day?

- Have a back-up plan in the event I do have to cancel school during the school day once students arrive. Please know that I am very hesitant in ever doing this, but weather is unpredictable.
- Please ensure that you have a plan for your child/ren to get into the house in the event there is a loss of electricity. Many students only have keyless access. Set up a plan on how your child/ren will gain access to your house if there is no electricity with either a key or the help of a neighbor or family member, etc.

I hope this explanation helps you understand the process of whether or not to cancel school. If you have any questions, please feel free to reach out to me at (217) 488-2040 extension 405 or e-mail at jl Larson@pretzelpride.com.

Jill Larson, Superintendent