

Snow Day Decisions

There are always questions about how decisions are made to keep schools open or to delay/close them due to weather. Below is a list of the decisions and conversations that arise when making decisions about winter weather.

School If We Can

Our goal is to have school whenever it is safe to do so. The safety of our students and our staff is paramount. If our buses run, we know our students will have safe transportation. We also consider the commutes of our staff, student drivers, and parents. We want everyone to be able to safely get to and from school on days when the weather is not cooperating. When conditions are challenging, we know staff or students may not arrive by the first bell. We have procedures for staff to arrive late or, if they cannot get to school at all, to cover their duties. If a family does not feel safe sending their child to school, they can also elect to keep them home.

When we have a snow day, many of our families do not have snow days at work. Snow days create significant disruption for working families, and finding daycare or taking time off can be challenging. Some of our families do not have other options when school is suddenly closed, leaving them unable to supervise their children. The result is that some of our families have to make tough decisions about whether to work or to stay at home and sometimes risk the consequences of their employment. The result is that some of our youngest students may be left home alone, which is not a situation we want for our families.

National Weather Service

We use a lengthy process to evaluate weather when making snow day decisions. We start by receiving updates twice daily from the National Weather Service (NWS) on upcoming potential weather events. NWS provides updates via its website and through weather briefing emails. If a severe event triggers a warning, the NWS offers webinars for school district officials to review their forecasts and models. There will often be multiple webinars before and during an event. Two web pages with valuable NWS information are available [here](#) and [here](#).

Local Superintendents

On the day before a potential weather event, I meet with local superintendents in La Crosse County. We schedule Zoom meetings to discuss what we are hearing and what we are likely to do. In addition, we contact additional superintendents in the area to stay up to date on their thoughts and decisions. On the morning of a weather event, we are typically on a group text at 4:00 a.m. until a final decision is made. Closures or two-hour delay calls generally are made by 5:00 a.m. On days when a storm arrives midday, and we decide to close early, we want to make that decision by 10-10:30 a.m. at the latest.

Driving the Roads

On the morning of a weather event, Rick Kline, our Director of Transportation, and I are on the road by 4:00 a.m. We remain in communication during this time to discuss road conditions across our district. We pay particular attention to whether plows have been out yet, if we observe plow trucks on the road, road conditions throughout our district, and the rate at which the snow is falling. Our communication and observations go a long way in the decision-making process, as we know that areas within our district are unique to us and not shared by surrounding areas.

Communication

When a decision has been made, I contact Samantha Pederson, our Communications Coordinator, who sends automated messages to families and updates our social media/webpage. I then contact the news media, our local private schools, and the Boys and Girls Club to inform them of our decision. In addition, if there are impacts on co-curricular activities, I coordinate with the activities director to determine how this impacts our activities for that day.

Our overall goal is to keep the school open and for everyone to safely get to and from school. If that is not possible, we will collaboratively decide to ensure the safety of everyone associated with our district. We know that no decision will satisfy everyone; however, we do the best we can with our on-road observations and the information we receive from the NWS. We appreciate your understanding and patience as we try to make the best decisions possible.

Thank you, be safe, and welcome to winter!

Ryan