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Time to review snow days procedures

by Debra Bowers, Ph. D., Superintendent of Schools

Although we have had a pleasantly mild winter so far, this is Minnesota and a winter storm could be upon us at any time, so it's time to review our school district's procedures regarding snow days.

This column is intended to help you gain a better understanding of how we arrive at decisions to close or delay school and explain procedures for notification of students and families, including a new voice broadcasting service we've implemented to alert families within minutes of a decision regarding school closing.

Whether to shorten a school day, to close school entirely, or to remain open is always a complex and tough decision. Many factors must be considered as we balance the diverse needs of our families while keeping the safety of our students in mind. Our administrative team works with the company that provides our bus service, St. Louis Park Transportation, as weather changes to monitor and evaluate conditions. We solicit the opinions of transportation and law enforcement officials, snow removal authorities, and surrounding school districts.

We make the decision to cancel or delay the start of school prior to 6 a.m. and begin our system of notification immediately. Our new voice broadcasting service uses technology to simultaneously call every family in the district. School closing information is posted on our district website, www.slpschools.org and telephone hotline, 952-928-6055, by 6 a.m. WCCO radio (830 AM) and local television channels 4, 5 9 and 11 also broadcast school closing information.

When school is canceled for an entire day (or more), all school-related activities are canceled. Buildings are closed. All Community Education classes and activities are canceled, including childcare.

When the start of school is delayed, our notification procedures indicate the number of hours of delay. Morning kindergarten will be canceled. All staff will report to work as soon as possible. Community Education childcare will open as soon as staff arrive. Buses run on a delayed schedule. For instance, if a two-hour late start has been announced, children should be at bus stops exactly two hours after their normal pick-up time. All activities scheduled to begin after the delay, including district extra-curricular events and Community Education after-school and evening classes and activities are held as scheduled.

Finally, a developing storm could necessitate a school closing before the normal dismissal time. In this case, all school-sponsored and Community Education classes and activities scheduled after the early release will be canceled. Students in junior and senior

high will be dismissed, with bus routes running as soon as school is out. Elementary students will be sent home on the bus or according to early dismissal instructions parents have indicated on emergency cards on file at each child's school. Families with children in Community Education childcare will be notified immediately and expected to pick up their children as soon as possible.

Closing school due to weather-related emergencies is a decision we take very seriously. We try to make our decisions based on the best interest of our students, however, it is always the right of the family to decide to keep children home from school. Just be sure to notify school staff that your child will not be attending school. As always, we continue to work in partnership with our community to put Children First.

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