

November 24, 2009

SCHOOL CLOSING INFORMATION

The winter season is upon us. Our District staff understands that our decision to open or close schools in bad weather has a big effect on families. We also understand that our students are better served – both academically and socially – by being in school. But, as always, our top priority is the safety of our students.

HOW DO WE MAKE OUR DECISION?

Please understand that we make the decision to open or close the schools in bad weather based on a careful analysis of all relevant factors, such as:

- **Information on road conditions from transportation staff.** We must give careful consideration to the most dangerous roads in the City of St. Francis and the Milwaukee County. Also, we must consider that some high school students drive to school.
- **Amount of snow and ice accumulated.**
- **Whether precipitation is continuing.**
- **Building conditions (such as, whether we have electricity and heat).**
- **Parking lot conditions.**
- **Temperature and wind chill.** Please remember that many students walk to school and some non-resident students must wait outside for the bus.
- **Weather predictions.** We prefer not making our decision based on weather predictions, which are not always accurate. However, sometimes this is unavoidable.
- **What other school districts are doing.** We also share information with other local districts and check whether they are opening or closing.

WHO MAKES THE DECISION?

As Superintendent of Schools, I am responsible for the final decision, based on the above factors and recommendations.

HOW IS THE PUBLIC NOTIFIED?

For up-to-date information on school closings, tune to Channel 4 (TMJ4), Fox 6 (WITI), Channel 12 (WISN) and Channel 58 (CBS) or radio – WTMJ 620, 94.5 WTKI, 1130 WISN AM, FM106 WMIL, V100 WKKV FM, AM 920 WOKY, and 95.7 FM WRIT. You can also check our District web site www.stfrancisschools.org for information. Do not call the school unless it is an emergency.

WHEN IS THE DECISION MADE?

I must make the decision by 6:00 AM or earlier, so we can notify radio and TV stations. If I wait longer to announce a closing, some parents will have already left for work, leaving their children unsupervised.

WILL WE CLOSE SCHOOL IF CONDITIONS WORSEN?

Keep in mind that, even if weather conditions worsen, we cannot reverse our decision in the morning without endangering students. Once we make the decision to open schools, many parents rely on it and leave for work. If we then send students right back home, many will return to unsupervised bus stops and empty houses. If conditions get worse during the school day, we may need to have an early dismissal, but we will give adequate notice.

Although my staff and I do our absolute best in this process, we know that often no perfect decision exists. If you do not feel as though it is safe for your child to attend school, use your best judgment on whether he or she should attend. Also, discourage teenagers from driving in bad conditions and offer them alternatives if weather conditions worsen.

We hope that this explanation helps everyone understand the process that our District staff uses to make the best possible decision for all in our District. We apologize, in advance, for any inconvenience that school closings or late starts may cause you. Thank you for your understanding.

Yours truly,

Carol R. Topinka
Superintendent