

Posted by Wayne Gersen, Superintendent – February 7, 2008

Making “The Call”

Over the past few weeks I have received several phone calls, emails, and face-to-face questions on “The Call”: the decision on school cancellations and/or delayed openings.

“The Call” to close school is typically made by me and Assistant Superintendent John Aubin at 5:30 AM based on three factors: feedback from the road crews in Norwich and Hanover; a review of weather outside and weather forecasts; and my degree of confidence that students can get to and from school safely.

When the road crews tell us that roads are hazardous “The Call” is easy: we take whatever advice they offer. The crews operating the snowplows have first hand information on driving conditions and a wealth of experience at determining how drivers will be able to navigate the roads.

When substantial snow has accumulated and the forecast calls for more snow, “The Call” is also fairly straightforward: we tend to cancel. When snow has already accumulated, we not only need to think about driving conditions, we have to be certain we can clear all the entryways and fire exits in the school as well as the sidewalks and parking areas. The combination of observing the weather and reviewing weather forecasts is not failsafe. In my 25 years of making “The Call” I can recall instances where a steady snow at 5:30 AM becomes a cloud free sunrise despite weather forecasts to the contrary... and instances where I’ve gone to bed with no snow forecast only to find six inches when a phone call rouses me.

The last part of the equation, my judgment as to whether we can get students to and from school safely, comes into play roughly 1/3 of the time. In exercising my judgment in these situations, I need to be certain that the trips TO school and FROM school are likely to be hazard free. There are two occasions in my experience where buses slid off the road on a trip home during a snowstorm and I know of several instances where students and parents and students had accidents trying to get to and from school on icy or snowy roads. Based on those experiences, I tend to err on the side of caution, preferring to field questions about why I made “The Call” to close school when “everyone knew the weather would be sunny” as opposed to questions about why I decided to have school when “I should have known roads would be treacherous”.

A final reminder: we make a decision to have a two-hour delay to afford time for the road crews to clear the roads. There are occasions when we subsequently learn that we cannot assure safe travel to and from school and end up canceling school. In my four winters in Hanover, that has occurred twice, including February 7 of this year. While I appreciate that this often creates complications for families, for the reasons outlined above I feel compelled to err on the side of caution.

I hope this provides parents and community members with a sense of how I make this complicated and sometimes controversial decision.