

Update from the Superintendent

To: Parents and Guardians
From: Bill Husfelt, Superintendent
Date: August 20, 2021

Closing school for any reason is never an easy decision. It's particularly challenging, however, when the reason that a school closure is being considered is that bad weather is forecast for our area. Weather, as you know, is predictably unpredictable which makes the difficult decision even more taxing. If you watched the projected path of Tropical Storm Fred, for example, you probably saw several different destinations between Apalachicola and Mobile Bay!

Given the advent of hurricane season and tough weather calls ahead, I'd like to walk you through some of the factors that influence a decision like this.

I must first consider the safety of the students and staff. Will they be safe at school if bad weather happens (which does happen sometimes completely unpredictably) and can they safely travel to and from school? When bad weather is looming, we work closely with the meteorologists from both television stations (WMBB's Ross Whitley and WJHG's Chris Smith were awesome resources this week), local emergency management officials and our own Safety and Security team. Typically, we're consulting with this team virtually around the clock to ensure we have the latest information and can make the best decision.

As the Superintendent, it's also incumbent upon me to consider the impact closing schools has on our community as a whole. Many employees can't find emergency child care and many businesses have to close if their employees can't come into work. While school was not designed to be child care, the truth is that we are child care for many families and that's a huge responsibility. We are also responsible for providing free breakfasts and lunches to thousands of students and that's something else we must consider when making a decision to close schools.

When we close schools, we know there's going to be an impact to the school calendar as well since specific amounts of instruction are required each semester. Many parents plan far ahead based upon our school calendar so changing a day can mean upsetting plans for a lot of families and that's something we try to avoid. Make up days, for the most part, are out of our purview and are driven by the Florida Department of Education. We don't yet know about the changes to our calendar as a result of the two days we missed this week but as soon as something is finalized we will update our community.

Please rest assured, however, that when a decision to close school is made we use many tools to communicate that with our community. Using the phone numbers and email addresses parents/guardians provide to us in Parent Portal, we reach out by automated phone call, email (if there's time for that) and we also use social media messages and mainstream media blasts to make sure the word gets out in our community. Community members can also follow us on social media for regular updates.

Ultimately, parents make choices every single day about whether or not to send their children to school as the law requires. Parents decide whether or not their children are healthy enough to

go to school, they decide whether or not to get their children up for school and they decide how involved they can be/will be in their child's education. When bad weather is looming, parents need to make the best choice possible for their children. Depending upon where they live, and that area's capacity to flood, that may mean calling in an absence on a severe storm day.

I venture to say every time a parent has called to explain a storm-related absence in light of documented bad weather, our principals have done all they can to work with those parents. Working through difficult situations with families is who we are, it's what we do.

So, the next time that bad weather approaches (and unfortunately there will always be a next time), please know that we're working closely with area meteorologists, emergency management officials and local leaders to carefully choose the right plan for our district. It's never going to be an easy decision and it's never going to be a decision that makes everyone happy and that's okay. It will always be a decision, however, focused on the safety and security of our students and staff.

Stay well and God Bless!