

## **In Session with the “Oriole” Superintendent**

By, Mark D. Rosekrans, Superintendent of Charlotte Public Schools

### **Inclement Weather – Information and Preparations**

With the calendar now entering October and winter conditions on the way, I thought it important to revisit the school district’s process for school closures or delays as it relates to inclement weather. I have released this information in prior years for awareness, but felt it appropriate to update the information and send it out to our parents and community at large for this year.

In an effort to try and describe our process of evaluating inclement weather and what goes into our decision making in regards to remaining open, delaying or closing, I offer the following information to hopefully provide some better understanding of how a decision is made:

First, whenever questionable weather comes our way, select staff members, including myself, are up assessing road conditions. Usually this means driving our roads by at least 4:30 a.m. Several primary roads and secondary roads are assessed and wind direction is factored into the evaluation if the weather involves blowing and drifting snow.

Fog and ice conditions present entirely different considerations; yet, they are evaluated to determine if travel is possible and done so safely. We have already experienced fog this fall and have decided to remain open.

Other considerations assessed are the temperature and wind chill. A long standing practice for our school district has been a wind chill of 25 below zero. This practice has been consistent with other school districts in our county over many years. Clearly, districts have discretion at the moment in time when a decision is to be made on any given day. Our intent is to be sensitive to the cold conditions yet balance it with maintaining continuity in school district operations. If this past winter repeats itself this year, we will no doubt have to consider wind chill as a contributing factor in our decision making.

We also interact and consult with many other districts in our county and adjoining counties on questionable weather days. Communication between the districts is paramount during this time period. District personnel are sharing information on weather conditions and making judgments as to what should or should not be done. Additionally, governmental agencies (Road Commission, State Police, MDOT etc.) are consulted as appropriate and their information is considered in the process.

Finally, decisions are based upon much communication and deliberation among our leadership team. We consider all aspects of a weather situation, including safety, and base a decision on the information we have assessed and evaluated. At times it is not easy. Every weather related situation, is unique in itself. The circumstances surrounding the weather and subsequent decision can and will be subject to being questioned. At times, some decisions are viewed unfavorably. We understand this reality and value the commentary offered and will factor it into our decision making in the future.

Following are other informational items I would like to mention regarding our practice when weather days arise:

1. When poor weather comes during the school day and we are already in session, we will avoid releasing early. Releasing early creates too many unknown situations for families, specifically with child care or child supervision.
2. Some of our buses depart for their morning pick-ups around 6:00 a.m. or soon thereafter. We are committed to making weather related decisions between 5:30 and 6:00 a.m. and preferably even

earlier. This past winter we were able to make calls the evening before due to the weather and/or road conditions. Once this decision is made, calls to the media and our staff begin immediately.

3. Watching local TV stations (WILX, WLNS and Fox 47) and/or listening to local radio stations are your **VERY BEST** informational sources for school closing or delays. We also use our call out system to reach parents on their preferred phone number. Calling the transportation office or your student's school is not beneficial. Office staff are not present in the mornings when decisions are made.

4. Parents and guardians of our students always have the option of keeping their students home when in their own judgment that decision needs to be made.

Additionally, many reminders are sent throughout the school year, specifically during the winter months to families to have their children dress appropriately for the winter weather conditions. Many times, we have students without hats, gloves, boots or a coat – let alone a winter coat.

Please keep in mind that we do live in Michigan and the weather conditions change constantly and quickly. We will try to complete our weather assessments, with the information that we have, as soon as possible and directly communicate our decision to you.

It is our hope this article will give you a glimpse into our process and how challenging it can be.

Go Orioles! Oriole Pride!!