

DEALING WITH INCLEMENT WEATHER IN THE SMITHVILLE R-II SCHOOL DISTRICT

by

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With the approach of winter also comes the possibility of inclement weather, dangerous road conditions, and the need to consider school cancellations and early dismissals. The purpose of this report is to briefly discuss some of the implications that should be considered related to such cancellations or early dismissals.

The impact of school cancellations and early dismissals is perhaps more complex for the school district and for families as we again have five school buildings with each starting and dismissing at different times. To meet the demands of this varied schedule, the bus system runs two different route schedules (double-routing). The first schedule provides service for Middle School students (Grades 6-8) and High School students (Grades 9-12). The second schedule provides service for Primary Elementary School students (Grades Pre-K-2) and Upper Elementary School students (Grades 3-5). The double-routing system can complicate the decision to cancel school and parental plans for dealing with such cancellations. Please consider the following:

Canceling School

If inclement weather occurs at night, selected roads are normally checked by driving them before 5:00 a.m. A decision of whether or not school will be canceled is typically made by 6:00 a.m. because some buses leave the bus lot by 6:30 a.m. The school district makes a single telephone call if classes are to be cancelled and a dispatch service sends the cancellation notice to most radio and TV stations in the metropolitan Kansas City area. The following media outlets have agreed to participate in this notification process this year:

KMBC-TV (9)
KSHB-TV (41)
KCTV-TV (5)
WDAF-TV (4)

KFKF Radio (94.1 FM)
KBEQ Radio (104.3 FM)
KMBZ Radio (980 AM)
KCUR Radio (89.3 FM)

KMXV Radio (93.3 FM)
Smithville Herald
Kansas City Star

Additionally, in an effort to better inform parents and students about school closings, the school district will use School Messenger to notify parents who have children enrolled in the district with voice and text communication to participating individuals ([link](#)) regarding school closing and other calendar and emergency information. The school district will also utilize social media. There is no charge to participate in the School Messenger program. Finally, when school is canceled or will use altered start or dismissal times, we will place a message on the home page of the school district web site www.smithvilleschooldistrict.net

The first buses arrive at the Middle School and High School at around 7:20 a.m. A problem could occur if inclement weather intensifies about that time and road conditions rapidly deteriorate. If that happened, it is possible that the second bus routes may not be able to safely operate, and they may have to be canceled. ***This potential situation would find students in grades 6-12 at school with Pre-K-5 students still at home.*** It is very important for the parents of these younger children to consider how to react to the implications posed by such a situation, particularly in those households where both parents work and may not be at home.

Starting School Later in the Day

If inclement weather strikes late at night and clears by early morning, it is possible that school could start an hour or two later to allow road crews to clear roads and to permit the first bus routes to operate in the daylight. Under this scenario, classes would dismiss at their regular times in the afternoon. Area radio and TV stations would also carry public notification of such a change in scheduling.

The school district would use this option with great caution since much confusion would be caused if road conditions did not improve and school had to be cancelled after parents made plans for their children based on the premise that school would start later that day. Again, parents should develop plans with their children in the event such a situation occurred.

Dismissing School Early

If inclement weather occurs after classes have begun for the day, school would not be dismissed early unless it was determined that road conditions were likely to deteriorate during the day creating the most dangerous driving situations at regular dismissal time. It is not unusual for a snowstorm to hit at mid-morning and to dismiss immediately would place buses on the roads at the most dangerous time of the storm. Often, such a storm dissipates during the day and road crews have the major roadways in better condition by late afternoon than when the storm was most intense.

If the schools are dismissed early, they would dismiss “in shifts” following the schedules of the double-route bus system. For example, it may be determined that because of inclement weather conditions, the last school building to dismiss (Primary Elementary School) must do so by 2:00 p.m. Therefore, the Middle School and High School must dismiss by 12:45 and 12:50 a.m. respectively in order for the first schedule of buses to return from their MS/HS routes and be at Primary Elementary School by 2:00 p.m.

Dismissing early would help ensure that the second bus routes are able to complete their routes before darkness falls in the late afternoon. It is advantageous for buses to complete their routes before nightfall during inclement weather conditions.

Summary

Parents are urged to visit with their children to ensure that plans are made at home to safely address the various situations described above. Also, parents can obtain the latest school closing or early dismissal information by listening to or watching a major radio or TV station.

Decisions regarding the cancellation of school can be challenging, but must be made with the safety of our children being of paramount importance. As such, the school district will generally be conservative in making a determination of whether school should be cancelled, or dismissed early, when faced with threatening weather conditions. Thank you in advance for your patience as we address the changing road conditions caused by inclement weather this winter.