

## Making the Call

When I was taking classes to be a Superintendent, I do not recall any discussions or assignments on what is probably one of the more stressful parts of the job...deciding when to call off school. Several years back, I once shared a “lighter” version of my secret method for determining whether to hold school on a given day:

$$\frac{2.97(b(d+c)+M)}{3(h)w-nf} > \frac{6.42(r-p)}{j+o}$$

*0.0F is for the forecast, b is the school bus tire tread depth, s is the inches of snow, d is the drift height, w is for the wind speed, c is the percentage of child wonder I have in me that loves an unexpected snow day, m is for the mom paranoia in me that wants to make sure our students are safe, h is for how hungry I am for the cookies that the neighbor boy promised his mom would bake for me if I called off school, and n is for the number of neighboring school districts that have already made the decision to cancel.*

*On the other side of the equation is r for the responsibility of making sure our students have access to every minute of education they are entitled to, p is for the parents that now need to scramble to make sure their children have safe supervision if they are scheduled to work, j is for the days in June students might need to make up and will really hate even though right now they will say they won't, and o is for the oversight the state has in making sure we meet our hours of instruction requirement. If the left side is greater than the right side, I call off school...simple as that.*

Humor aside, in reality, as with many decisions, it often gets down to predicting what will happen when no one really knows. It is rare, but occasionally, events create a situation where the decision to hold school is not related to the weather.

Last week Friday was one of those situations. As I shared with parents, I had an extremely small window to act as I knew that it would be too late to get the word out if I delayed even a little longer. I was already pushing the limits. We talk about “erring on the side of safety.” As a parent and grandparent, I tend to do that. I don't ever want our students to be in a situation where they could potentially be harmed. In that situation, I valued the ability to get information out fast, even if it had to be limited.

At the same time, I also understand the need for our law enforcement officers to be able to work in an environment that does not have curious on-lookers on the fringes. Sometimes, putting out information creates a situation where crucial resources are diverted to handle those that are curious. Add in the craziness of social media and the rampant spreading of rumors it creates, instilling fear in those in the community. It breaks my heart that confidentiality becomes scarce in these situations. The speed at which information travels in this world is jaw-dropping.

We can shake our heads at social media, but within a very short time, the news feed in the Los Angeles Times was referencing a “possible active shooter” and that our school district was closed due to a threatening social media post, none of these assertions true. The power of the media to create and shape fear and opinion is incredible.

I am very grateful to the Platteville Police for immediately reaching out to me with information as the situation unfolded. They gave me the autonomy to make the decision, but then followed my decision with their support. The Grant County Sheriff's Department was immediately on the scene providing

assistance. I am especially grateful to Platteville Police Chief Doug McKinley for his constant contact and updates, but also impressed with the compassion exhibited for those involved.

As I spent time reflecting on the situation this weekend, I thought about the many short notes from parents thanking me for taking quick action to protect their loved ones. It is not often those of us in leadership get positive feedback. Those thanks belong to the many law enforcement personnel who willingly put themselves in harm's way to protect and serve our community.