



# Tomorrow's News Today

*News From the Tomorrow River School District*

*From Michael Toelle, District Administrator*

**January 2018**

## **Winter Safety**

I just finished sending my staff a winter safety message and thought it would be timely to send a similar message to the community. With the snow starting to fly, the safety of our students, staff, parents, and bus drivers is always a big concern. To close school or to keep it open is often a difficult decision and something the district does not take lightly. The decision is based on so many unknown factors and like the weatherman, we have to make an educated guess on what the future will bring. We frequently joke about weathermen, and ponder how they keep their jobs with only being correct 50% of the time, while the rest of us wouldn't last very long with such a poor record.

When deciding to close school in the morning, multiple factors are taken into consideration. The decision isn't made from the comfort of my warm home, as I am frequently out on the backroads by 4:30 a.m. to check local conditions. We are fortunate to have a great group of bus drivers who are also on the roads early or have been out plowing during the night. They are a very reliable source for local road conditions and are used as a contact point. The local TV station weather forecast is also brought in as part of the decision making process. Once enough information is gathered, the local district administrators (Rosholt, Iola, Almond, Waupaca, Stevens Point) are in touch with each other to determine a plan of action. Unless conditions are drastically different from one end of the county to another, if one local district cancels, due to liability factors, the others generally follow suit. As a district, we like to make the decision prior to 6:15 a.m., which gives us enough time to contact TV and radio stations and to put out a message via our alert system.

The scenario for closing school early is similar, but is based more on the future forecast. If conditions are declining and the outlook is for further deteriorating conditions, the administrative team is gathered to make the decision and instructed to implement closing procedures. To ensure the safety of our youngest students, parents of children in Grades 4K – 3 are called so it is clear where their child/ren should be going. The administrative assistants, counselors, and others make hundreds of calls in about an hour of time, which is a monumental task. To leave enough time for calls and to alter the schedule, if school is dismissed at 12:30, our decision needs to be made by 10:30 a.m. Occasionally, the after school program, team practices, games, and various other afternoon or evening events will be canceled due to conditions. Again, this is a joint decision made by the administrative team, athletic director, after school program coordinator, and other parties who have events running. Calling for those events can be done in a shorter time period, but notifying parents for the younger students is always a major task.

Occasionally a parent or community member may not agree with our decision to keep school open or to close early. For instance, recently we had about two inches of snow, and upset was voiced on social media about practices not being canceled. If practices were canceled, I'm sure just as many parents

would have been upset and questioned the decision. I am hoping we will make the correct decision 100% of the time, but the decision is only as good as the information we are able to gather.

Please remember when school is being closed, it is for the safety of the students, bus drivers, parents, and staff. We do realize it creates an inconvenience for parents, but we need to do what is best for our entire school community. On the flipside, if school is open, and you don't feel driving conditions are suitable for bringing your child to school, feel free to call the office to let us know your child won't be in school that day. In essence, my safety message is be safe, use personal judgment based on your local conditions, and don't rush. Being slightly late will never make or break your child's education. This is not a free pass to keep your child home one day per week or to repeatedly be late during the winter, just a means of using your judgement in keeping your family safe.

As always, feel free to contact me if you have questions or concerns about closing school, school activities, curriculum, or just have general question. Please remember: my door is always open, my computer is on, and my phone is available to help make the school experience for every child the best possible.

Have a safe, warm, and enjoyable Holiday Season!