



November 12, 2021

Dear Lamoille North Families and Staff,

It appears that our long fall season might officially be over and our winter weather is right around the corner. Before we know it, snow will start to fall, and with all of its majestic beauty comes unpredictable weather. As you know, from time to time, it becomes necessary to close school altogether. Sometimes, reasons other than snow, such as power outages or freezing rain and sleet that arrive at precisely the wrong time, can alter the schedule of the day. Of course, safety is always our top priority when making these decisions. I recognize that I shared information with you in a previous communication about inclement weather days, but it is so important that I thought I would communicate some information again.

Lamoille North towns span approximately 251 square miles, and the conditions can often be quite different from one end to the other and in between. In addition, we all know that our Vermont weather can be very unpredictable and often changes drastically in a short period of time, or at the last possible minute. Sometimes a best judgement call just needs to be made. There are no absolutes other than that safety is the most important factor.

I would like to take another opportunity to share with you how these decisions are made. Our transportation system is centralized and all buses travel from each of our towns to the campus. If one town experiences freezing rain and the roads are considered potentially unsafe by our road crews in that town, we will close school even if the weather conditions and roads in every other town are safe for travel. This is the hardest thing for many to understand. Decisions must be made based on the safety of **all** of our students and staff in **all** of our towns.

In addition, we give consideration to our students who are new drivers on winter roads and to whether the faculty, at large, commuting from all over the state, will be able to arrive safely and if we will adequately be able to staff the school for the day. We will never have a delayed opening unless our road crews make that suggestion. Sometimes a little extra time to treat the roads is needed, especially if a storm hits after the roads have been sanded, but that is the crews' decision alone to make. A majority of the time, the crews are able to manage weather and road conditions to ensure that the roads designated as bus routes are ready in time for a regular opening of the school day.

I rely most heavily on the expertise of our road crews when it comes to evaluating the weather conditions, because they are already out on the roads and have the best "real time" knowledge. We have our cell phones set up for alert text messages from the State of Vermont. Also, we regularly monitor the following sources for forecasts and predictions: The Weather Channel, WCAX, NOAA, Roger Hill from Weathering Heights, and the Vermont Agency of Transportation.

We will make school closure decisions by 5:30 am, after talking with road crews from each town. A message will be sent to all families and staff using contact information we have for you in PowerSchool. Please make sure that your contact information is accurate and communicate any changes to your school registrars so that you receive up-to-date information. Michele Aumand, my colleague, calls the television and radio stations to alert them of closures. We try to get our notifications out between 5:30-5:45 am so that we can prevent staff from getting on the roads and give families enough time to make alternative plans.

One of the most difficult calls has to do with power outages. We rely on the best predictions from the power company regarding the length of time we could be without power. It takes about 60 minutes just to get our bus drivers all back to central locations and students loaded to dismiss. Each circumstance is very individual.

Likewise, our job is to close based on the overall conditions of the entire district. If at any time, a parent/caregiver feels that conditions are such at home that the roads feel unsafe to drive to school, the parent/caregiver can choose to keep a student(s) home even if we open.

We also want to remind you that we cannot use weather days as remote learning days now that the State of Emergency is over. We will need to make up any lost days at the end of the year, as has traditionally occurred pre-pandemic.

I would like to warmly thank all of our Lamoille North families in advance for patience and understanding in dealing with power outages or closed school days. I realize how frustrating it can be if conditions seem fine at your house or on your roads when we make a decision to close, or a power outage lasts longer than expected, and we keep school open. These decisions are made with all the best available information possible, in a very short period of time, and taking into account all Lamoille North towns. I will do my very best to keep school open whenever I can, while maintaining the safety and security of our students and staff.

My best to you,

Catherine Gallagher, M.Ed.
Superintendent of Schools
Lamoille North Supervisory Union