

**Hampton Elementary School District
Office of the Superintendent
380 Main Street
Hampton, CT. 06247**

Superintendent's Report

Dated 2/24/21

Written 2/20/21

For the

Meeting of the Hampton Board of Education

**A report on
Snow**

Snow - it has been almost non-existent during the first half of the winter season and then came February. We have had - at the writing of this report - five snow days and there is a winter storm watch in effect for Monday.

I have become very concerned about the number of snow days we have had this year and its impact on the continuity of learning for our students, the planning for classroom activities for teachers, and the impact it will have at the end of school as we make-up those days.

As the superintendent, I asked our administrative team as well as a few teachers what they thought about snow days verses "Remote Learning Days". The consensus was that: "A snow day is a snow day." So that is exactly what we have implemented. When there is a concern for student safety, we close school.

Let me define some of those terms. We already understand what a snow day is because it is simple: Stay home. The term "Remote Learning Day" seems to be simple: stay home and turn on your computer to Google Classroom. There is a catch to that simple definition.

The first complication is that we are teaching very young children who have very short attention spans. In the classroom, our teachers "engage" the students. The students raise the hands, talk to answer questions, create pictures or complete an art project with the active help of their teacher or paraprofessional and, when they need it, receive those small but effective emotional supports. At home, they may not have the active adult support they need or they have their toys right next to them or the refrigerator or boxes of cookies. Their parents need to do their own home activities or the children are sent to a neighbor's home or grandma babysits.

The second complication is that remote learning relies on technology. All of our students have been trained and have practiced working remotely this year. They bring their ChromeBooks home one day each week and use SuccessMaker or have access to their homework materials. However well we have planned for our students to be placed into “Remote Learning”, a snow storm closing is different from a planned closure when our Covid protocol forces us to close.

A snow storm comes up and when we close, the students may not have brought their Chromebooks home so they cannot “attend school” on a remote learning day. In addition, remote learning is a two way activity - the teacher is on her/his side and the students are at the other end of the Google Classroom. During a storm, if either side of that Google Classroom loses power, there is no school and yet the remote day is counted as a school day.

The last complication is the struggle parents already have when we close school for a storm. Most parents need to go to work on school snow days so what do they do with their children, especially young children? When parents have to contend with the technology required for a ‘Remote Learning Day’, that adds another layer of planning that each parent needs to do.

So we have chosen to keep our school open for: “Every student, everyday, for 183 days” and on snow days, we will not just say, “Remote Learning Day” and count that as a “real” day of school. It has been our school wide goal in our reopening plan to make sure our students have the very best educational experience in a face to face learning environment for the full 183 days.

But what actually goes into my deciding to close the school. It is my sole responsibility and it is one of the most difficult decision any superintendent needs to make. Here is the sequence of activities that I have used to make my determination about closing HES:

1. I follow the weather reports on weather.com and listen to the weather reports from our local news outlets like WSFB
2. I often find the reports confusing and make predictions that are too general like the report for this last storm, WSFB predicted a “...coating to 2”. What does that really mean?
3. Depending on when the storm is predicted to start and is less than 6 hours away, I call Dr. Baran in Scotland and Mr. Henrici in Reg. 11. We discuss our plan. Most of the time, we determine when we really need to reconnect - 8:00 pm or 4:30 am - to determine what we will be deciding. The three of us need to coordinate and make a decision that for all three districts since Hampton buses need to transport Reg.11 students. If I close HES, then the buses do not run regardless of Reg. 11’s decision to remain open. At some point before the storm hits, we will make a unified decision...open or closed, late opening or early dismissal.

4. Before the decision is made, I have spoken to the foreman of the Hampton road crew for an update on the status of the roads. I review the weather reports on line and on TV. I call Andy since he is in Brooklyn and he reports what he is seeing.
5. The decision has been made by the three superintendents and I now have to call the key people. Sam is the first call and we develop a “blast out message” to all parents that goes to their emails and their phones are texted. The next call is to the foreman of the road crew to tell him our decision. Remember that they need to plow the roads as well as our parking lot. He needs to be on board. The next call is to our snow plowing contractor since his crew plows the playground, sideways, all emergency classroom door exits, and applies sand/salt to the sidewalks. I then call EastConn transportation to explain our decision. Andy receives a call next so he knows what he will need to do. His responsibilities are to walk around the school building to inspect that all of the emergency exits are plowed and the sand had been applied. Finally, I text Rose about my decision.
6. The three superintendents have also agreed this year that we will give parents as much notice of our decision as possible. We used to make most of our decisions at 4:30 am which means that parents and staff have only a few hours notice of our decision when they check their TV’s, phones or email. We have started to make our decisions (for four of the five storms) at 8:00 pm before the expected storm’s arrival. Sam blasts out the school closing message while parents are still awake. This change, I hope, can really help parents as they make their phone calls and prepare for the school closure.

I believe that keeping a snow day as a “snow day” will remain my operational choice. We are starting to move closer to warmer temperatures and longer days of sun light. I sincerely hope that the worst is behind us.

One personal note: It could be worse. My son lives in Duluth, MN and his day time temperature for the past week averaged -21degrees with a wind chill one day of -44! Add a snow storm of 12”. Then again, there is Texas.

Count our lucky stars!