



FANNIN COUNTY BOARD OF EDUCATION

SUPERINTENDENT
Dr. Michael Gwatney

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March 2, 2020

Dear FCSS Community:

Although March is here, winter continues. The possibility of additional *snow*, that four-letter word that brings joy to students and apprehension to school superintendents, remains for weeks to come. As of this letter, school has been cancelled five days.

Please know the decision to close school is not easily made; in fact, it is one of the more difficult decisions I must make. In addition to being a place where learning occurs, school is the warmest and safest place for some students. Sadly, school may be the only place where a child routinely receives food, and it may be where a child is most loved. These factors are significant and weigh heavily on my heart; however, safety is the top priority.

Throughout the entire decision-making process, I rely on the notion of “an ounce of prevention” and consider what is best for our student drivers, school buses, employees, and parents – all of whom travel our roads. Consideration must be given to the fact that many of our roads wind through high elevations and can quickly become dangerous compared to our major state highways. Some of our buses pick up children before 6:00 a.m. (and have extended return times in the afternoon). It is important to remember that those who live close to town generally do not experience travel issues as often or to the extent of those from the more remote areas of Fannin County.

I rely on meteorologists, but weather forecasting is not an exact science. As we saw last week, there may be significant variations between forecasts, even those generated by the same source. These forecast variations – even within a couple of degrees – may mean the difference between only a cold rain and a dangerous ice or snow event in our area. Given these considerations, when choosing an option that affects the safety of literally thousands of people – including our community’s most precious members – who are on the road to or from school, I must err on the side of caution.

The FCSS strives to meet the needs of our students, and your feedback does matter to me. Regarding the matters addressed in this letter, my goal is to ensure a proper balance of safety and sound educational opportunities all the while meeting as many needs as possible during times when “traditional” school must cancel.

Fortunately, the FCSS has a new initiative to help students continue with student learning opportunities that occur beyond the walls of our buildings. Last Friday, February 28, school was cancelled, but learning continued through a *Curriculum Online Learning Day* (COLD). This was offered not as a way to begin reducing days at school but as a way to continue learning when everything is otherwise cancelled. Embracing our technology for students in grades six through twelve, as well as customized assignment packets for those in the early grades, “classwork” was done outside of “class” last Friday. Teachers maintained office hours, and everyone communicated through various ways to facilitate learning.

Friday’s COLD was an experiment, and I want to know about your experience with it. Members of the district leadership team have created user-specific surveys that are being offered to parents/guardians (see the link below), faculty and staff (sent via email), and FCMS and FCHS students (given at school). Be sure to complete a survey. As I said, your feedback matters; in fact, it was used initially to inspire and to create the COLD process, and it will be used now to determine its future.

Please know that no matter the educational delivery model or the setting, the entire FCSS is committed to achievement – including our vision of a 100% graduation rate. Achieving this requires a whole-team approach with the students, the faculty and staff, and the parents/guardians working together. Your hard work, perseverance, and dedication make a difference, and I am proud of you and the FCSS!

Feel free to contact your child’s school or my office if you have questions. Thank you for your support.

Sincerely,



Michael Gwatney, Ed.D.
Superintendent

Parent/guardian COLD survey link: <http://bit.ly/COLDparentsurvey>