



FANNIN COUNTY BOARD OF EDUCATION

SUPERINTENDENT
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February 17, 2021

Dear FCSS Community:

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, the buildings have closed seven days this school year. Four of these days are expected to be forgiven by the Department of Education, and three have been *Curriculum Online Learning Days* (COLD). The COLD concept was originally presented as a four-day option; however, it will be extended beyond four, if required, based on need.

Beginning last year, COLD 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” has been done outside of “class.” Personnel maintained office hours during COLD, others taught virtual lessons in real-time, and everyone communicated through various ways to facilitate learning.

COLD has been an experiment, and based on the feedback I received from surveys (last school year), as well as recent feedback from stakeholders, the COLD process has proven to be successful. **As a result, using the flexibility afforded by our district’s Charter, any future inclement weather days that require a cancellation for the remainder of this school year will be an online learning day (COLD) in our school system.** Unless there is a large-scale disruption to the public utilities in our area (i.e., power, Internet, etc.) that would make the COLD implementation unrealistic, the school day will count (as virtual). This will allow learning to continue and reduce the likelihood that future emergency make-up days (e.g., “Spring Break”) will be needed to finish this school year on time.

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 have seen this winter, 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.

Please know that 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. 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. Whether we are dealing with COVID-19, the weather, or any other variable that affects our routine, 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