



### **Several Factors Determine School Closings Due To Weather**

**TUPELO, Miss.** – On frigid, snowy mornings in Northeast Mississippi, kids, and even parents, wake up with one thought on their mind.

*Will there be school?*

More times than not, it's an extra layer of clothing and out the door for another day of learning. But on those rare, bone-chilling days where it's too risky to be on the wintry roads, snowmen come to life and snowball fights ensue while thoughts of math and history and other key subjects are put on a brief hold.

Getting to that point, however, involves a meticulous process, starting with Charles Laney and his assembled team of weather watchers.

“First and foremost, we look at the safety of all our students and employees,” said Laney, the director of operations for the Tupelo Public School District. “We do not want to put them out in in any condition to cause harm.”

It all starts with a sleepless night and monitoring the radar while touching base and remaining in constant contact with key officials such as the highway patrol, WTVA and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA).

Then at 4 a.m., Laney and his crew get out to personally test the roads. After another meeting and consulting with superintendent Dr. Rob Picou, a decision is made by 5:30 a.m. whether there will be school.

“We rely so much on WTVA, NOAA and the highway patrol,” Laney said. “We ask about wrecks, and Matt (Laubhan) and Joel (Young) have really been great to work with.”

All it takes to close school is one bus route not being able to operate.

“You might have just one area of town with a lot of ice, but we can’t risk driver safety,” Laney said. “Even if all the other areas are deemed drivable, we won’t take that chance.”

Every attempt will be made to open the school doors, even if there is a delayed start or early dismissal. That especially true for tornado threats.

And that’s where things are different and can get a little dicey.

If a tornado watch unfolds under perfect conditions, there’s time for early dismissal. If not, all those tornado drills then begin to serve their purpose.

At Thomas Street, Joyner and Carver, there are safe rooms. At ECEC, Parkway and Lawndale there are reinforced hallways. The goal is to have safe rooms at all campuses in the near future. “It’s all about safety and making sure everyone gets home and that the bus drivers are in a position to return with no harm,” Laney explained.

As important is communication.

If there is no school or if there’s a delayed start or early dismissal, Laney relays all information to Gregg Ellis, the director of communications.

From there, Ellis uses social media, email, text messages and the WTVA and WCBI ticker to announce any type of closing.

“The goal is to have everyone informed by 5:45 a.m.,” he said. “We urge all our parents and students to use our alert system.”

For those not on the system, they need to contact Ellis at 662-620-6195.

“In five minutes, I can have them added,” Ellis said.

That way, all kids will know if there are snowmen to be built or tests to be taken.

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