



Update from the Superintendent

To: All BDS Employees

From: Bill Husfelt, Superintendent

Date: September 26, 2022

By the time you read this, we should all know far more about the eventual final track of the storm named Ian and we should all be in the final stages of executing our plans – whatever they are.

So, I'd like to take a few minutes to let you know about what goes on behind the scenes when something like this is brewing in the hopes that you can understand our decision-making processes a little better.

When any sort of severe weather is forecast in our area, we immediately begin consulting the meteorologists (Chris Smith at WJHG and Ross Whitley at WMBB) and we work closely with our partners at the Bay County Emergency Operations Center. While weather forecasting is never an absolute science, these guys have access to state-of-the-art equipment and they have years of experience predicting weather in our area. I lean heavily on their guidance and expertise and I know they share my primary concern which is always the safety of our students and staff.

At the same time, we hold many meetings and conference calls with our leadership team members to ensure we're planning for all eventualities. We, like you, learned a lot from Hurricane Michael and our plans now include scenarios where we completely lose communications and other worst-case situations. We certainly hope we never have to activate those plans but we're ready if we must.

One of our first concerns is always whether or not it will be safe to put the buses on the roads. We know our bridges are subject to closure in high winds and we know the dirt roads in our community can quickly become inundated and impassable in times of heavy rain. We also consider our facilities and their ability to withstand severe weather and flooding that's likely to occur in other areas in our community.

While it's easy to armchair quarterback in these situations and suggest canceling school if there's even a possibility of bad weather, we also have to consider the impact closures and school calendar changes have on our community. We know businesses rely on schools being open so their employees can report to work and it's a major disruption when we have an unplanned school closure for any reason. That doesn't mean it's not the right thing to do; again safety will always trump everything else, but it does mean we don't take these decisions lightly.

We also have to consider the impact a school closure will have on the overall calendar. We must be in school a certain number of days during the first semester and so a day canceled in September or October can't necessarily be "made up" at the end of the school year because that's a different semester. We know parents/guardians count on our calendar and often make vacation and holiday custody agreements far in advance. We are thoughtful about the impact a two-day cancellation can have on the holidays, for example, and we're mindful of our responsibility to try to adhere to the printed calendar as much as possible.

But, again, I can't stress enough that the safety of our students will always trump these inconveniences.

We also always want to make sure we're doing all we can to communicate with you and to reassure you that our processes and procedures will go on despite any weather-related interruptions. We're working to pre-process payroll early this week so you will still be paid on Friday and we're expediting the teacher lead money checks as well and hope to have all of those delivered to our teachers by Tuesday afternoon.

We are also incredibly grateful to all of the employees who have already stepped up for a possible shelter assignment ... our shelter responsibilities are a HUGE community service that we simply couldn't undertake without the willingness of our employees to join the teams.

We know you're depending upon us to make the right decisions for you and for our students and we have a strong track record of always erring on the side of caution. We know that we are all battle-scarred from our experience with Hurricane Michael and we want to do our best to honor our responsibilities to our entire community in the safest and most transparent ways.

We expect to have finalized our plans by tomorrow so please look for an important update on Tuesday. Please take a moment to make sure the HR portal has your most updated contact information in the event that we need to reach you in an emergency.