

January 3, 2017

Dear Parents and Guardians:

Though we have enjoyed a beautiful fall, winter season is upon us. We understand that our decision to close schools has a big impact on families. We also believe that our students are better served academically and socially by being in school. But, as always, our top priority is their safety.

How do we make our decision?

We gather as much relevant information as possible and base our decision on that analysis. This includes:

- *Information on road conditions from transportation staff, police, and highway road supervisors
- *An assessment of the amount of snow and ice accumulated
- *Whether the precipitation is ongoing
- *Weather predictions, temperature and wind chill data
- *Verification of building status-continued utility services, staff ability to clear our own roads, driveways and sidewalks
- *What other school districts are doing

The wind chill scales were recently revised to reflect better evaluations of risk for exposure to severe low temperatures. The media's predictions are evaluated along with data available from the Internet, forecasting services, and statewide emergency service systems.

State and county officials have recently installed a system of gates to effectively close down the NYS Thruway and surrounding expressways. Should they exercise this closure protocol, we may have little choice but to close school, especially if the NYS Thruway is closed.

Who makes the decision and when?

As superintendent of schools, I am responsible for the final determination. My decision is based on the above factors and recommendations from our Buildings and Grounds Director. We **try** very hard to make the decision no later than 6:15 a.m.

How is the public notified?

Our first notification will go out via our Blackboard Connect system to all phone numbers registered with us. If we do not have your correct phone number, you will not be notified. Up-to-date information is provided to the various radio stations: WBEN, WJYE, WBLK, WYRK, WECK, WBUF, WNSA-FM and television stations: WKBW, WGRZ, TWCN and WIVB and the district Website (<http://www.cheektowagak12.org>).

Will we close schools if conditions worsen?

Please keep in mind that even if weather conditions worsen, we would **rarely** reverse our decision and send students back home. Once we make the decision to open schools, many parents leave for work. If we sent students back home, many would return to unsupervised bus stops and empty homes. After we arrive at school, we may have an early dismissal, but we would make every effort to provide adequate notice to all parents. That process alone requires at least one and one-half hours of lead-time to accomplish. **All of our buildings have emergency generators and systems to maintain them as well as extra food, water etc.** They are safe places even when there are power failures or service outages elsewhere in the community. School is the safest place to keep the children while we contact parents and make arrangements for a safe return home.

Although my staff and I do our best in this process, we know that no perfect decision exists. **If you do not feel as though it is safe for your child to attend school, use your best judgment on whether he or she should attend.** Also, please discourage teenagers from driving in bad conditions.

We hope that this explanation helps everyone understand the process that our district staff uses to make the best possible decision for all in our district.

Sincerely,

Mary A Morris

Mrs. Mary A. Morris
Superintendent of Schools