



STERLING PUBLIC SCHOOLS

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TO: STAFF

FROM: TAD EVERETT, SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS

DATE: THURSDAY SEPTEMBER 1, 2011

RE: SUPERINTENDENT NOTES

I have stated on several occasions that the purpose of Superintendent Notes is to improve communication. Sometimes it means gathering input to make decisions, while other times it means simply communicating what was decided. Another intent of SN, which may be the most important, is to communicate why a certain decision was made.

I have received a large amount of feedback and questions regarding my decision to dismiss students early. Some individuals do not agree we should get out early, while others have voiced their opinion that we should dismiss at an earlier time. Additionally, some staff members have voiced their views that they should not have to stay until contractual time is met, and should be able to leave when students are dismissed. In order to address some of the emotions and questions surrounding this decision, this will be the focus of today's SN.

The Decision: Dismiss Students Early Due to Heat

As I stated in my call-out last night, I made the decision at approximately 7:00 PM to dismiss our students today according to our district's 1-Hour Early Dismissal Schedule.

Why Was the Decision Made to Dismiss Students Early?

This decision was made based on the National Weather Service's Heat Advisory for this afternoon, where temperatures are predicted to reach heat indexes of nearly 110 degrees.

The Decision: Require Certified Staff Members to Stay

I informed principals last night that certified staff members were to stay until their normal contractual dismissal time.

Why Was the Decision Made to Require Certified Staff Members to Stay?

This is a lengthy response so I am going to apologize in advance. When I make the decision to implement one of our district's Early Dismissal Schedules, or determine when students and staff should be dismissed, the safety and security of those students and staff is at the forefront of that decision. Secondly, I determine if there is any Collective Bargaining language that would impact, or require, a specific course of action. In this case, I did not believe there was a staff safety or security issue, and I followed 13.1

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paragraph 2 of the SEA Collective Bargaining Agreement and 15.6 of the SAESP Collective Bargaining Agreement.

Please allow me to explain. I spoke last night to five of our six principals (one was unavailable) and each informed me that he or she was planning staff activities between student and staff dismissal time. Though these activities varied depending on the individual environment of a building, it is important to note that each principal assured me these staff activities would take place in air-conditioned environments. Therefore, I did not consider the heat to be a threat to the safety or security of any staff members.

In regard to Contract language, I spoke with both Association Presidents this morning. During our conversations we discussed the aforementioned portions of their individual Contracts and agreed there was no language that supported staff leaving with, or shortly after, students. The exception, of course, was non-certified staff leaving with principal approval and no compensation.

Isn't There a Past Practice Regarding Staff Dismissal and Heat Days?

I was questioned about the past practice of staff leaving when students leave, so please let me address this issue as well. In order to make a data-driven decision, I researched the last time Sterling Public Schools actually dismissed early for a "Heat Day." To be honest, the results were surprising. Whenever we dismiss students earlier than our regularly scheduled day, and it's due to weather or an emergency, we are required to notify the ROE and ISBE. This is then tagged as an "Interrupted Day" on ISBE's website. In researching this topic we found that SPS and ISBE only have records dating back to the 2004-2005 school year. Since that time Sterling Public Schools has not had an "Interrupted Day" in August or September. In other words, believe it or not, it has been at least seven years since we have had an early dismissal due to heat. If my memory serves me well, it was in Dr. Booker's early years as superintendent the last time this occurred. Plainly stated, we really don't have a "past practice" regarding heat days.

Aren't Heat Days Just Like Snow Days?

This question may be the root of why this decision has evoked so much emotion. Right or wrong, I don't consider Heat Days and Snow Days to be on the same level-playing field when it comes to staff safety and security. What I mean is, during a Snow Day the weather and roads are usually getting more severe by the hour, creating a definite safety issue for staff traveling home. I don't consider it the same with Heat Days. Staff is inside in air-conditioned environments and the outside weather is not progressively getting worse. As a result, I don't consider the decisions during Snow Days as having precedence as past practice in regard to Heat Days.

A Reminder About Communicating Decisions

Here's a direct quote from one of my earlier issues of SN that directly addresses the issue of communicating decisions. After today's communication I think it is once again relevant:

"I truly value input from staff, and gather it in many different ways. There are times though that I believe a command decision needs to be made by an organization's leader. Sometimes contrary to popular demand, they are essential and best for the organization. I am not so naïve to believe that every command decision is necessarily a popular one. When this occurs, my hope is that through SN you will be provided background information that will help you understand why the decision was made. If you still have questions or concerns, at that time, please feel free to respond via email." - March 2, 2009

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