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## Strategies for Communicating with ELL Families During the Winter

### 1. Ensure that families know how (and if) instruction will be delivered.

Districts can vary in their plan to offer online classes when schools are closed for inclement weather. Families need to know how and when to access instruction if online classes will be offered.

### 2. Make sure families have information about school inclement weather policies in their home language.

While schools are required to share all handbooks and safety policies in languages that parents understand, providing a translation of the winter weather policy doesn't ensure that parents will know what it means when bad weather arrives.



At the beginning of the school year, and whenever a new student enrolls, ensure that parents understand: the difference between a delay, closing, and early release how busing will be affected during those changes how the school will communicate this information to parents where/how parents can sign up for notifications such as text messages or e-mails on school-related updates and closings.



### 3. Share options for back-up child care or transportation with families.



The challenges of providing child care when school have delays, early release, or closing have been underscored by the COVID-19 pandemic. Schools can help families by identifying some options that might be available in the school community (although some may also be closed during inclement weather). In addition, make sure any information about partner programs with child care options that are open when schools are closed

#### 4. Share information on winter safety and wellness with families.

Parents who are new to winter climates (as well as parents who have lots of experience with winter weather!) will benefit from reminders on cold weather safety and wellness tips such as removing cold and wet clothing quickly, making sure children avoid playing near big piles of snow on the street, heating a home safely and cost-effectively, waiting a safe distance from the school bus, and the importance of good hygiene during cold season. This also includes understanding why cold and flu season ramps up during the winter and why it may be particularly challenging during COVID-19.

If students are attending in person, send home reminders for students to wear warm clothing to school so they are prepared if they are playing outside, and students who are not adequately clothed for cold weather (gloves, hat, scarf, winter jacket, heavy socks, and boots) may not be allowed to play outside.

#### 5. Help students and families understand the outside temperature.

What does 12 degrees Fahrenheit mean? What is the difference between 0°F and 0°C? What do "below zero" and "wind chill" mean? Students may not understand just how cold it is as they head to school and may get frostbite while walking or waiting for the bus. Explain where families can check the temperature each morning, keeping in mind that they might not have access to smartphones or the Internet. They also may come from countries that use Celsius temperatures. If families don't have access to a television, radio or telephone to call a weather hotline, talk with local community agencies to see if there is a way to provide some low-cost communications equipment for safety purposes.







**6. If families have a car, encourage them to have a plan in case they break down or slide off the road, as well as an emergency kit.**

Encourage families to keep warm clothes (even a blanket) in the car since it gets cold while waiting for help. Minnesota teacher Kristina Robertson notes that she keeps a coffee can with a candle, matches in a ziploc, a flashlight, and a chocolate bar in her car – although the chocolate bar always seems to disappear!



**7. Explain some ways families can prepare for a bad storm, tornadoes, etc.**

Families will have to get food, water, milk, and other supplies such as diapers if a big storm impacts their area. Also, if power is down, families should know that the heat may be off. Above all, they need to find a way to follow the local news for updates and make sure they understand the information being conveyed on the news. Remind families of this information if a storm is forecast.

**8. Teach students and families how to dress warmly in layers.**

Demonstrate how to dress for winter and explain how layers keep you warm without overheating.



**9. Help parents understand how to pay heating bills or get financial assistance to avoid having the heat shut off.**

Newcomers and refugees may not know the process for paying bills for their home, which can lead to a loss of services. Find out what options are available for families in your community from local agencies and organizations.



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