

FINAL CALL

Despite Twitter lobbying, superintendent bases school cancellations on facts

Matthew Marvar | Staff Writer

When the weather forecast predicts snow, Superintendent Gail Kist-Kline doesn't do a snow dance, flush ice cubes down the toilet or wear her pajamas inside out. Instead, she sets her alarm for 4:00 a.m. to see for herself if the weather plays out as planned.

"Whether (the weather) actually comes or not, I still get up at 4:00 and I track the apps on my phone, I listen to what's on the news, I go outside and I drive the roads," Kist-Kline said. "I also check in with our maintenance person to make sure our sidewalks and parking lots and the school buildings are all okay, check with our transportation person—what's their feedback on the buses...and then I just recently started checking in with Mason Police as well."

But senior Keefer Kaneshiro said he isn't satisfied. He said that because there are many young, inexperienced motorists that drive to school, the snow day circumstances should compensate even more in the name of safety.

"Some people have had their license for less than two or three months and they're driving," Kaneshiro said. "They're going to be less apt to drive on these roads."

The snow day talk doesn't just end there, though. Twitter has become a popular way to express thoughts on snow days or the lack thereof—and junior Baylee Scott said that she does it for the fun.

"I just like to make people laugh," Scott said. "Twitter is fun because people will say what most people are thinking but don't have the guts to say. And if you

can say it in a modest way, then I think it's funny."

Kist-Kline, who signed up on Twitter in November, agreed. She said that it's important to maintain a level of professionalism but also to enjoy everything that her new communication tool offers.

"When we get something that's tweeted to us, I try to respond, but always thinking about responding respectfully and professionally," Kist-Kline said. "(We) love to insert our personality and be funny, and we can all appreciate humor."

But because tweets can be misinterpreted, Kist-Kline said that it's easy to cross the line of what is appropriate to display online.

"But humor doesn't always translate," Kist-Kline said. "...We are all creating a digital footprint—when we put something out, it doesn't really go away."

Though the line between sarcasm and disrespect is blurred, Kist-Kline said she takes the tweets lightheartedly.

"It's hard for me to say what that line is—there are times when you absolutely know when someone is crossing the line, and you know when someone is tiptoeing up to it," Kist-Kline said. "I, like anyone else, appreciate someone who is clever and witty—love that—(someone) who is pleading, perhaps, and I can read that and smile, and think that it may not influence my decision, but I can certainly appreciate that."

Kaneshiro, however, strives to maintain his social media presence behind that line. According to Kaneshiro, it's okay to express frustration in a tweet as long as it's not directed right at someone.

"I don't do anything personally attacking anyone because that's where I draw the line, and that's where I think people take it too far," Kaneshiro said. "I worry about some tweets, but when it comes to snow days, I think that it's sort of unfair if they don't cancel school—especially when I crashed my car. I feel like I have a right to be a little outraged about that."

But in the end, the number-one priority for Kist-Kline is safety. Last year, even when Mason City Schools exceeded the five-day limit, it didn't matter—if the weather was bad, school would be cancelled.

"If it's not safe and we've exceeded the number of hours, we still need the day off," Kist-Kline said. "We were there last year. We only had five days—we used all five. And so we ventured into those online days. That wasn't (about) how many days we've used or not used...it's not safe. That's the principle decision."

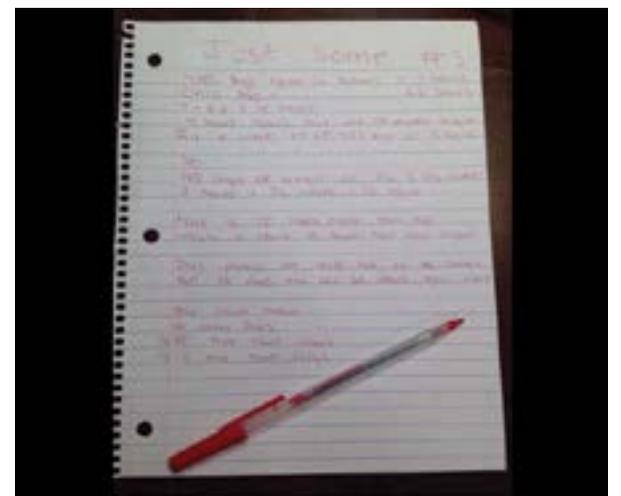


Photo by Madison Krell

Superintendent Gail Kist-Kline uses her Twitter account, @DocGKK, to update Mason City Schools students and families about school cancellations and district news.