



Glebe Street Elementary School

September 29, 2011, Evacuation Follow-up

September 30, 2011

Dear Families,

On this morning after Glebe Street Elementary School's evacuation to Knox Junior High School, there is much to communicate. I hope that this letter will answer all of the questions that you likely have.

Background and Timeline:

At approximately **1:00 p.m.** water began to collect at the lower end of Glebe Street just in front of the entrances to the school's parking lot and bus loop. This is fairly typical at this time of year when falling leaves can block storm drains, and it is usually resolved by raking away leaves and muck to allow the water to flow. Yesterday, however, despite the efforts of District and City workers who responded promptly and in force to work on the drains, the rain was just too much too fast. The workers, who labored in knee-deep water during the torrential downpour, succeeded in clearing the drains; but by this point the drains were full and there was no place for the water to go.

At approximately **1:45 p.m.** Johnstown Police closed Glebe Street at its 4th Ave. corner and informed me that if water did not recede they would also have to close the street at its 1st Ave. corner. It was at this point that it became clear to me that the school's dismissal could be affected, and I began to confer with members of our school's Emergency Response Team and the District's Directors of Transportation and Facilities to prepare for an alternate dismissal. Options that were considered included a delayed dismissal until the water cleared or the implementation of our evacuation plan to Knox. At about this time the City Engineer arrived to assess the situation and join his team in the cleanup.

By approximately **2:00** the situation appeared to be improving. The rain had slowed to a sprinkle and the water level on Glebe Street was decreasing before our eyes. The City Engineer was confident that if the rain continued to hold off Glebe Street would be open to traffic in time for our dismissal.

By approximately **2:15**, though, the heavy rain had resumed and the water level, which had by now decreased significantly, began to quickly rise again. The City Engineer still felt that Glebe Street could be clear enough for traffic by dismissal if the downpour was short-lived. At about this time the Director of Transportation confirmed that he had mobilized sufficient buses and drivers to move all of our students and staff to Knox at a moment's notice. I determined 2:30 as our cutoff time to stop watching the water level and either call the buses or announce a delayed dismissal.

By **2:30** it was raining as hard as ever, and the water was as high as it had been all day. Johnstown Police had now closed both ends of our section of Glebe Street, thus making an on-time dismissal from our school impossible. In consideration of multiple student safety factors (explained below) I opted for evacuation over delayed dismissal, and the announcement was made to teachers to prepare their students. By this time telephone communication to the families of our 320 students prior to dismissal time was impossible, and the Johnstown PD officers stationed at the road blocks assured me that they would re-direct Glebe parents to Knox as they approached the closed section of Glebe Street. We also contacted our webmaster to request that the sudden change be posted on the School and District websites immediately; made the same request to the PTA for its Facebook page; and Superintendent DeLilli arranged radio notification with WENT.



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By **2:35** the first bus arrived, and we began calling classes in reverse grade-level order to board the buses. I chose to begin with 6th grade because our oldest students are more capable of preparing themselves quickly than our youngest, and I preferred to keep our youngest students in their familiar setting until the last moment.

By **2:55** the last bus had transported the last group of students and staff members, complete with contact information for all students and a safe and orderly evacuation of 320 students and nearly 30 staff members had been completed in 20 minutes thanks to the efforts of Glebe staff members, the District's Departments of Transportation and Facilities, the City of Johnstown, and most importantly, Glebe's students. A dropping pin could not have been heard in the halls of our school as Glebe teachers led their students to buses.

By **3:50** all of our students had been dismissed safely with our confidence that they had been released either to parents or by a parent-approved process.

Why evacuate to Knox?

At the determined decision time of 2:30 there were no sign of the rain slowing, and weather radar showed multiple bands of rain following the current one. It was conceivable not only that Glebe Street could be closed through the evening, but also that travel would worsen throughout Johnstown making dismissal more delayed and less controlled the longer we waited. Moreover, in order for parents to have picked up students from our school, they would have to have parked their cars on 1st or 4th Ave. and walked their children back through the pouring rain and flooded streets. I ruled dismissal from Glebe out completely when I heard thunder and saw lightning. Knox was ready for us; the buses were ready for us; and I simply will not allow our children to walk outside in thunder and lightning.

Evaluation

It is now time to examine this decision and the execution of the plan that followed. As strange as it sounds I am grateful to have had this opportunity to test our crisis response at a time when there was no danger to student or staff safety, and I could not be more confident as we move forward. The safe and orderly evacuation of 320 students and 30 staff members within 20 minutes is an accomplishment made possible by the swift thinking and teamwork of everyone involved, and I could not be more proud of them.

In conclusion, I leave you with two promises:

1. There is nothing more important to me than the safety and security of Glebe's students, and I will willingly sacrifice time, comfort, and convenience in order to protect our kids.
2. We will learn from this experience with the goals of identifying and preserving the aspects of this plan that contributed to a safe, orderly, and fast evacuation, and a secure release of students. We will also work towards improving the efficiency of the student sign-out process without compromising our capacity to control each student's exit, and we will explore opportunities for instant communication in addition to the websites, Facebook, radio, and police direction.

Thank you all for your continued support and cooperation as we strive to provide your children with the best education we can while keeping them safe and secure. I hope to see you all Sunday at the Panther Prowl!

Sincerely,

Daniel Carroll, Principal