

Buhler Community,

A quick summary and appreciation for our staff and parents. This is long but I wanted to walk you through this afternoon and the next steps for us as a district.

SUMMARY

At 1:15, I was notified of a fire in the north part of our district. As I waited for a call back from the fire department, at 1:30 I notified our transportation director, Cassi Deister, to ready all drivers and get them to buses just in case I decided to evacuate. I also notified the Crusader Corner Daycare Director, Heather Faulkner, and Plum Creek Elementary principal, Tammi Graff, to start mentally preparing for an evacuation. We made contact with two evacuation sites, Inspire Church and Crosspoint Church, to verify we could use their facilities. Both were amazing and said yes to our request right away.

At 1:45, I made the decision to evacuate both facilities. At the time I thought Inspire Church would be the closest and not in the direction the wind was blowing. However, parent pick up would take parents down 43rd street and I was hearing it would be closing. I pivoted immediately to Crosspoint Church.

Paul Erickson went straight to the church to start working on logistics and Kyle McClure went to the building to help get students safely out as needed.

By 2:00, Mrs. Graff notified me they were out of the building on the way to Crosspoint. All students arrived before 2:15 and were safely and calmly escorted into the sanctuary. Our bus drivers are THE BEST in the business. Responsive, professional, and ready to help.

THANK YOU

Our administration, Tammi Graff and Sierra Michelstetter, led with calm grace and patience. Our support staff stepped right up to help parents pick up students in an organized manner and verify students were leaving with appropriate guardians. Thank you to Melissa Ratzlaff, Joyce Raya, Jessica Koster, and Brenda Smith for moving the lines along and checking students out.

Our staff were amazing with keeping students calm and reassuring any who were upset. Knowing students often mirror the emotions of the adults, everyone stayed confident, calm, and showed great patience as we navigated a new process with little time to prepare.

To our parents and guardians, THANK YOU for following directions, remaining calm, showing up in a timely manner and not escalating a stressful situation. Better Together never felt more real than today. All students were picked up by 3:15.

Special shout out to The Hutchinson Fire Department, Operations Chief Unruh, and Emergency Management Director, Adam Weishaar, for their dedication to our community, keeping everyone safe, protecting property and their communication. I sure hope they get some sleep soon!

NEXT STEPS

7:30 tomorrow morning Mrs. Graff and I will meet with the PCE staff to reflect on what went right and what needs to be improved for situations in the future. Both Mrs. Graff and I will address the student body at 8:00 in the morning to affirm students for their positive attitude, willingness to follow directions, and behavior.

At 9:00 tomorrow morning, our district admin team will meet to review what happened on the back side and front facing side so we can learn from each other.

At 11:00 tomorrow morning, Cassi Deister and I will meet with our bus drivers to learn from their perspective what went right and what needs attention in the future. AND basically to THANK THEM! Cassi was incredible and was able to adjust to changing routes, cancelling routes, and communicating with drivers all afternoon. Not many people understand the critical role the director and drivers play in a crisis and I am blessed to work alongside them.

Please keep those that were affected by the fire in your thoughts and prayers. Have a safe, healthy, and blessed Christmas.

Cindy Couchman, Superintendent

Tammi Graff, Plum Creek Elementary Principal