

Getting our schools open last week after the windstorm and subsequent power blackout, and communicating with our 10,000 students and their families and more than 1,000 employees, was a major challenge.

Our first task once the winds died down was damage assessment. By Sunday night we knew that power was off in every one of our 10 schools, as well as the transportation office, the maintenance office and the central office. We had no location with power to work from, so key staffers gathered at our central office and worked by flashlight.

We found out quickly that no buildings had been damaged. We were lucky. Two doors away from our central office building a roof had come off. We did have a lot of trees down and some light damage to some of the outdoor athletic facilities, but nothing that would keep us from opening school.

Except, of course, none of the schools had any electrical power.

I've been asked if we could have had school without power, since in the following days the temperatures were moderate (actually, though we may not have noticed at the time, they were gorgeous days) and there was plenty of daylight. But while that might be true in a classroom with exterior windows, many classrooms are in interior hallways and were dark. Also, hallways, bathrooms, and other areas were dark. And the buildings' safety systems were all compromised.

Communicating was so difficult. Landline phones were out at most staffers' homes and cell phone networks were only partly functional. (Cell phones were also running out of charge by the second day.)

To reach our students' families and our staff we always use our web site, our automated calling system, and our district email system. Except we had no electricity, no Internet access, and no phone service. Our staff still found ingenious ways to make all three systems work, and we were able to get the word out that there was no school on Monday. Or Tuesday. Or Wednesday.

Throughout these days we faced a series of inter-related difficulties. We had a storage tank full of diesel full – we had just received a delivery – but no way to pump it into buses. We had food going bad in refrigerators, but couldn't re-order until we knew the power was back on. There were many traffic signals out, and I was extremely reluctant to have our buses, and our students who drive, on the roads. There were a number of streets blocked by downed trees or wires, and we had to create alternate bus routes, and reach those students to tell them where to meet the bus. The city was under a water boil advisory, which would make the difficult situations in our school kitchens even more complex. (We also had a payroll to make on Friday, and we knew many employees especially needed those checks on time. But we had to devise a way to print the checks.)

As the power began to come back on, we did checks of all the major systems at each school. Finally, we were able to open again at nine of our 10 schools on Thursday, and at

the last one, North Elementary, on Friday. I would like to thank those employees who worked so hard, and with incredible resourcefulness, to get us up and running again. And I'd like to thank all of our students and their families for their patience and understanding.

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