



CASE STUDY

Cherry Creek School District Strengthens Weather Safety Across 67 Schools

Weather affects every corner of Cherry Creek, making consistent, informed safety decisions essential across campuses, athletic facilities, and events.

ABOUT CHERRY CREEK SCHOOL DISTRICT

On any given day, Greg Critchett — Assistant Director of Athletics and Activities at Cherry Creek School District — may be helping coordinate a football game, monitoring conditions for a middle-school track meet, planning for an outdoor graduation ceremony, or supporting schools as they make weather-related decisions that impact students across Cherry Creek School District.

Critchett helps support a district that serves more than 53,000 students across 67 schools over 108 square miles of the Denver metropolitan area. The district includes 44 elementary schools, 11 middle schools, eight high schools, and two career and technical education programs. With athletic events, outdoor activities, facility rentals, and school operations taking place every day, weather is a constant factor in decision.

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THE CHALLENGE

Weather impacts far more than athletics

While athletic events often bring weather-related decisions into the spotlight, weather impacts nearly every aspect of district operations.

Colorado's weather presents a wide range of challenges throughout the year. Thunderstorms, lightning, snow, ice, wind chill, extreme temperatures, and rapidly changing conditions all have the potential to affect students, staff, and visitors.

For Critchett and his team, weather monitoring supports everything from athletic competitions and practices to graduation ceremonies, transportation planning, recess decisions, and winter weather preparation.

"Sometimes you're not at the stadium — someone is at the golf course or running cross country at the reservoir," Critchett said. "You have people all over, and what are we doing for them in terms of giving them tools to be safe?"

The challenge isn't simply knowing what the weather is doing. It's ensuring that coaches, administrators, staff members, and event leaders all have access to the same trusted information when making decisions.

"If everyone shows up and everyone goes home, we hit our number-one goal for every event," Critchett said.

THE SOLUTION

One district with countless weather decisions

Cherry Creek School District uses DTN weather intelligence and lightning detection technology to monitor changing conditions, respond consistently when weather threats develop, and support decisions across the district.

Critchett and his team regularly review forecasts, radar imagery, lightning alerts, temperature data, and countdown timers to understand current conditions and what may be coming next. The information helps leaders evaluate whether events can continue safely, whether schedules need to change, and when emergency protocols should be activated.

"You see the storms coming. You see the lightning markers. You can tell whether you have a window to get something done or whether it's about to get worse," Critchett said.

The same information helps coaches and administrators prepare during weather delays and communicate expectations to students, staff, and spectators.

"Being able to have that countdown timer is huge," he said. "Coaches can see what's happening and start preparing for what comes next instead of just sitting there wondering how much time they have."

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“DTN WeatherSentry gives you good data to make informed decisions,” Critchett said. “We can have coordinated conversations because we’re all looking at the same information.”

Football doubleheader

During a football doubleheader with teams traveling from Colorado Springs, thunderstorms started to move into the area. District leaders monitored lightning activity and weather while implementing sheltering plans for teams and spectators. One visiting team remained at a nearby school while officials evaluated whether conditions would allow the games to continue safely.

Following multiple weather delays, play resumed briefly before additional lightning activity created another interruption. Ultimately, district leaders decided to postpone the remaining game and resume the following day.

The situation required coordination among athletic directors, coaches, officials, and visiting schools while weather conditions continued to evolve.

“DTN WeatherSentry gives you good data to make informed decisions,” Critchett said. “We can have coordinated conversations because we’re all looking at the same information.” For Critchett, situations like these demonstrate the importance of having trusted weather information available when decisions must be made quickly.

Beyond Athletics

While athletics are a major focus, weather monitoring supports many other district activities as well.

During a graduation rehearsal at one of the district’s high schools, approaching storms threatened preparations involving hundreds of students and staff. By monitoring lightning activity and forecasts, district leaders identified a window that allowed key portions of the rehearsal to proceed before another storm arrived.

Weather intelligence also plays a role in day-to-day school operations.

Elementary schools use weather data to help determine whether students can safely go outside for recess. District leaders evaluate snow, ice, and temperature conditions that could impact outdoor activities and transportation.

Athletic directors monitor travel routes for visiting teams, including Colorado’s mountain passes where weather conditions can change rapidly.

Whether the decision involves a football game, a graduation ceremony, a recess period, or a winter weather event, the goal remains the same: keeping students and staff safe.



On-the-go access

For Critchett, one of the biggest benefits of DTN weather data is that it reaches people wherever they are. Coaches, administrators, and staff members may be at stadiums, on athletic fields, at golf courses, or moving between campuses — weather intelligence is available on mobile devices to help ensure critical alerts are received when they matter most.

“You might have people out running, so they’re not checking their email,” Critchett said. “But if their Apple Watch vibrates and they look down and see an alert, that’s huge.”

The value of that accessibility became especially clear during a middle-school track meet being held at a high school facility. When lightning alerts were issued, staff members quickly began implementing established safety procedures. Within minutes, participants and spectators had been moved to safe areas, and the venue had been evacuated.

“We cleared the entire track, secured equipment, and had people moving inside within minutes,” Critchett said. For him, those moments demonstrate the success of the district’s approach to weather preparedness and communication.



THE RESULTS

Consistent safety decisions across the district

With more than 53,000 students, dozens of campuses, multiple athletic facilities, and activities taking place year-round, Cherry Creek School District depends on timely weather information every day.

DTN helps support a culture of preparedness by providing weather intelligence that district leaders can use to make real-time decisions, communicate consistently, and respond quickly when conditions change across fields, playgrounds, and beyond.

Whether the challenge involves thunderstorms, lightning, snow, cold temperatures, transportation concerns, recess planning, or major community events, district leaders have access to the information they need to help keep students, staff, athletes, and visitors safe.

“Weather changes in an instant — WeatherSentry gives us a layer of information that helps coaches, sponsors, and administrators make informed decisions to protect our kids,” Critchett said.

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