

ABINGTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS
Office of the Superintendent of Schools

December 28, 2010

Dear Parents and Guardians:

With the possibility of a snowstorm occurring at any time, I would like to take this opportunity to remind the community that school closings, delayed openings and early dismissals will be a potential for the next three to four months. Our district staff understands that our decision to open or close schools in bad weather has a major effect on families. We also understand that our students are better served both academically and socially by being in school. But as always, our top priority is the safety of our students.

HOW DO WE MAKE OUR DECISIONS?

Please understand that we make the decision to open or close the schools in bad weather based on a careful analysis of all relevant factors. Some of these factors include:

- Information on road conditions from the Abington Highway and Police Departments and local transportation officials. We must give careful consideration to the most dangerous roads in the district. Even if your street looks clear, travel elsewhere in the district may be dangerous. In addition, we must consider that some high school students drive to school.
- Amount of snow and ice accumulated.
- Whether precipitation is continuing.
- Building conditions (such as whether we have electricity and heat).
- Driveway and parking lot conditions. The ability of the Abington Highway Department to clear school driveways and parking lots and maintenance and custodial staff members to clear and treat school sidewalks and doorways during storms.
- Temperature and wind chill. Please remember that some of our students walk to school and some must wait outside for the bus.
- Weather predictions. We prefer to not make our decision based on weather predictions, which are not always accurate. However, sometimes this is unavoidable.
- What other school districts are doing. We also share information with other local districts and check whether they are opening or closing.

WHO MAKES THE DECISION?

As Superintendent of Schools, I am responsible for the final decision, based on the above factors and recommendations.

HOW IS THE PUBLIC NOTIFIED?

Tune to local television and radio stations for up-to-date information on school closings. We will also be utilizing the features of the automated telephone communication system. Please be sure that your telephone contact information, submitted to your child's school, is correct. Please do not call the schools unless it is an emergency.

WHEN IS THE DECISION MADE?

The decision must be made by 5:30 AM or earlier so we can notify radio and TV stations. If we wait longer to announce a closing, it would make it very difficult for families and school personnel to change their morning routines. We will send the automated phone message as soon as possible.

WILL WE CLOSE SCHOOL IF CONDITIONS WORSEN?

Keep in mind that, even if weather conditions worsen, we cannot reverse the decision in the morning without endangering students. Once the decision is made to open schools, many parents rely on that decision and leave for work. If we then send students right back home, many will return to unsupervised bus stops and empty homes.

WILL YOU DISMISS EARLY IF A STORM IS UNEXPECTEDLY HEAVY DURING THE SCHOOL DAY?

Although early dismissals are unlikely, all parents should have a plan in place in the event it is necessary. Our system uses the same buses to transport the grades 7-12 students, followed by grades 4-6 students and lastly the Early Childhood Center students; this is why our school start and dismissal times are staggered. We are not able to call additional buses to release all of the students from all the schools at once. Therefore, conditions may warrant a staggered early dismissal for all of the schools. In addition, it might be necessary to only dismiss the grades 7-12 students early. This will allow the buses with slow driving conditions to get a head start on their first route and hopefully arrive at the elementary schools close to the planned dismissal time.

Although the staff and I do our absolute best in this process, we know that often no perfect decision exists. If you do not feel as though it is safe for your child to attend school, use your best judgment on whether he or she should attend. Also, discourage teenagers from driving in bad conditions and offer them alternatives if weather conditions worsen.

I hope this explanation helps everyone understand the process we use to make the best possible decision for our students.

Peter G. Schafer
Superintendent of Schools