

Winter in Marshfield

Dear MPSD Families & Stakeholders:

While we all enjoy a little snow in the winter, at some point it will close schools, delay openings and maybe even cause early dismissals. Although our students are better served by being in school, our top priority is their safety. I know the decision to open or close schools in bad weather has a major impact on families. If it is absolutely clear we are going to be the snow jackpot, as the media calls it, schools can be cancelled the night before. If there is a chance we might be able to have school the next day, the final decision has to wait until the morning. As much as I hate waiting, it is the most responsible way to make the decision.

HOW IS THE DECISION MADE?

The decision to open or close the schools in bad weather based on any and all available information.

- Status of road conditions from the Marshfield DPW and Police Department. 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 many high school students drive to school.
- Weather predictions that are received from MEMA and/or FEMA, in consultation with Marshfield safety and highway officials.
- Amount of snow and ice accumulated.
- Whether precipitation is continuing.
- Projections for high tides/flooding that impact certain parts of the town.
- Building conditions (such as whether we have electricity and heat).
- Driveway and parking lot conditions. The ability of the DPW to clear school driveways and parking lots and custodial staff members to clear and treat school sidewalks and doorways during storms.
- What other school districts are doing. We also share information with other local districts and check whether they are opening or closing. However, these conditions can vary greatly depending on the town even if they are our next door neighbor.

WHO MAKES THE DECISION?

I am responsible for the final decision, based on the above factors and recommendations.

HOW IS THE PUBLIC NOTIFIED?

I will use blackboardconnect.com to send out a voice message and email to the district. I will also post on my Twitter account: @MarshfieldSuper. Please be sure that your telephone contact information, submitted to your child's school, is correct. All local media outlets are also notified and publish the information.

WHEN IS THE DECISION MADE?

The decision should 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 makes it very difficult for families and school personnel to change their morning routines. I send the messages as soon as possible.

DELAYED STARTS

Sometimes, the weather pattern and road conditions do not necessitate a cancellation, but creates a need to have a delayed start (and hour or two). The same process that is used for deciding a cancellation will be used to determine a delayed start. In using these later starts, we are able to provide more time for the DPW to effectively plow our roads and parking lots. In addition, they provide our students, families and buses more time to arrive safely at their respective school. Finally, a delayed start allows for the school day to count towards the 180 days that are required by law.

Please note that when we do have a delayed start, there will be no preschool in the morning or in the afternoon.

WILL WE CLOSE SCHOOL IF CONDITIONS WORSEEN?

Please 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 send students right back home, many will return to unsupervised bus stops and empty homes. Unfortunately, even with the best information available from many sources New England weather can surprise all of us.

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

Early dismissals are very unlikely, we risk sending students home to empty houses. Families should please have a plan in place in the event it is necessary. Our system uses the same buses to transport all of the grades. This is why our school start and dismissal times are staggered. After one group is transported the buses go and begin another loop. 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. 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.

WHAT ABOUT BUS TRANSPORTATION DURING STORMS?

Waiting at home for a child to arrive when the bus is late can be nerve wracking, especially during a storm. Road and traffic conditions will slow the travel. Please remember that your

child is actually safest on the bus, due to its size, as it slowly moves through town in a storm. This slowdown can get compounded as the buses complete their loops from grade to grade. If a loop requires 10 extra minutes in order to deliver students safely, the buses arrive to begin the next loop 10 minutes late. If next loop takes 10 extra minutes, the bus is now 20 minutes late.

WHAT ABOUT SIDEWALKS AND GETTING TO BUS STOPS?

The DPW clears the major sidewalks as soon as they can. Families need to please be aware that unfavorable sidewalk conditions can occur during and after a snowstorm. Even if sidewalks have been cleaned, citizens clearing their driveways and walkways can cause sidewalks to be blocked. Melting and re-freezing of snow can also create an icing situation. Families should always be aware of the conditions of their child's walk to school or the bus stop and act accordingly.

ALTERNATE BUS STOPS

At times, we will have to use alternate bus stops due to icy conditions on some of our hillier streets or due to high tides/flooding in some of the low lying areas of town. Those alternate stops are listed on the main district website, www.mpsd.org, under the "Our District" tab.

Importantly, 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, please discourage teenagers from driving in bad conditions and offer them alternatives if weather conditions worsen.

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

Jeffrey W. Granatino
Superintendent of Schools