

From the Office of the Superintendent...

FAQs: Inclement Weather, Snow Days, and School Closings

Inclement Weather, Snow Days, and School Closings: *In preparation for what we hope will be a mild winter, it seems appropriate, nevertheless, to provide you with an update on how we make the decision to open or close schools. We understand that our students are better served – academically and socially – by being in school. But as always, our top priority is the safety of our students.*

Who makes the decision?

The Superintendent of Schools is responsible for the final decision. If the roads are judged to be unsafe for bus travel or for walkers, the decision will be made to cancel school or call for a delayed opening.

With whom does the Superintendent consult to make the decision?

Many people are consulted before and during snowstorms and other inclement weather situations; specifically, the Assistant Superintendent of Schools, the HW Director of Maintenance, and the Hamilton and Wenham DPWs to get updates on road conditions. It is imperative to give careful consideration to the most dangerous roads in Hamilton and Wenham. Even if some streets look clear, travel elsewhere in Hamilton or Wenham may be dangerous. Also, we must consider that some high school students drive to school.

Feedback from the bus transportation company is also considered. The Superintendent may consult with the Hamilton & Wenham Police and Fire, as well as Superintendents in neighboring communities. When possible, the Superintendent may personally drive the roads.

What information is gathered to help make the decision?

The Superintendent takes into consideration Information on road conditions, amount of snow and accumulation, predicted duration of precipitation, building, parking lot, and sidewalk conditions, temperature and wind chill, and weather forecasts.

When is the decision made?

The Superintendent must make the decision to open or close school by 5:30 a.m. or earlier so as to notify radio and TV stations and make the Connect Ed call. Waiting any longer leaves parents little time to make arrangements for childcare, and many of our staff, particularly middle and high school staff members, need to be prepared to leave their homes to travel to Hamilton and Wenham (or not).

How are families and staff notified?

Notice of a delay or cancellation is communicated in the following ways:

Connect Ed: A Connect Ed call will be made to *home numbers* only. The call will occur at or around 5:30 a.m. to accommodate parents who need to arrange child care and so parents know not to send middle and high school students to catch their early busses.

Local TV Stations: Channel 4 (WBZ), Channel 5 (WCVB), Channel 7 (WHDH), Channel 56 (WBUR), Channel 25 (Fox 25)

Local Radio Stations: 1030 AM (WBZ), North Shore 104.9 FM

How do you get weather forecasts?

The Town DPWs subscribe to a meteorological service to which the Superintendent has access, but she also relies heavily on local news broadcasts. As you know from personal experience, weather forecasts, especially in New England, are not 100% accurate. We rely on the best and most current forecast for help in the decision-making process.

What is a “delayed opening”?

Rather than close school for a whole day due to short-term weather situations, there may be days when the beginning of school will be delayed one hour, ninety minutes, or two hours. When the opening of school is delayed, the radio and TV stations above will be notified and told, for example, *“Delayed opening – One Hour, Hamilton-Wenham Regional Schools.”*

During delayed openings, school will simply start later by the length of the delay. Bus pickup, therefore, will also occur later. For example, if your child is normally picked up at 7:35 a.m., during a one hour delayed opening, he/she will be picked up at 8:35 a.m. Lunch will be available, and student dismissals will be at the regularly scheduled times.

On “delayed opening” school days, the HW Integrated Preschool Programs are cancelled.

Will the schools close if conditions worsen during the day?

Keep in mind that even if the weather conditions worsen, it is not possible to reverse our decision in the morning without endangering students and staff traveling to work. Once we make the decision to open schools, many parents rely on it and leave for work. If we send students right back home, many will return to unsupervised bus stops and empty houses. If conditions worsen during the day, we may start the buses 30-45 minutes ahead of schedule at the middle and high schools. The early start at the secondary schools is our attempt to keep the elementary bus runs “on time”.

Will there be athletic practices and/or games, after school or evening activities/meetings if the schools are closed?

If the schools are closed for the day, there will NOT be any athletic practices, games, after school or evening activities. All will be cancelled. If a storm arrives mid to late afternoon, on a day school is in session, it is likely that athletic practices, games, after school or evening activities will be cancelled. Notice of cancelled activities will be communicated to you through a Connect Ed call and the television and radio stations listed above.

Lastly, ***if you do not feel it is safe for your child to attend school on a stormy day that school is in session, use your best judgment on whether he or she should attend school on that day.*** If you decide to keep your child home, please call your child’s name into the school’s absent alert line so we will know that he or she is home for the day.