

Inclement Weather Protocols, Considerations and Communication

Any time there is a forecasted inclement weather event, the Superintendent of Schools is responsible for making the decision to: 1) cancel school, 2) delay the start of school, or 3) release the students early. It is a decision requiring serious consideration of many different factors. The safety of students, staff and parents serves as the primary focus of concern. Each storm is unique and demands varied considerations. We understand that any disruption to family routines poses challenges to parents and students. We continually try to balance minimizing the negative impact on student learning while prioritizing the need for safety.

You should know that it is always the parent/guardian ultimate right decide whether to send their child to school in the case of a predicted inclement weather event. Any absences due to a parent/guardian decision relative to their child and inclement weather will be considered an **“excused absence”** by the School Department.

What is the thought process for the decision?

1. Significant consideration is whether emergency vehicles have access to school buildings.
2. Careful consideration is given to the prediction of snow and/or ice accumulation and timeline. Keep in mind even if your street looks clear, roads elsewhere in town may be dangerous. In addition, school driveways and parking lots are usually the last areas in town that are plowed because street passage is their priority. Parents must have a clear drop-off area and staff and students need a place to park. This step includes consultation with DPW officials.
3. The rate and expected duration of precipitation is reviewed, until midnight prior to a storm and then again beginning at 4:00 a.m., on all local news outlets, as well as a subscription weather service made available by the Department of Public Works. Often times, the rate of accumulation determines if snow plows can keep up with the clearing the roads.
4. The consistency and commonalities of predictions are synthesized to develop the best guess weather scenario.
5. School building conditions such as electricity and heat are reviewed.
6. While each school district has unique circumstances, several school districts are consulted and information is shared.
7. The decision has to be made by 5:00 a.m. or earlier the day of the storm. We know that notifications must be made to parents, students and staff prior to leaving for school. School bus begin their routes by 6 a.m. for the high school runs
8. If professional meteorologists are reasonably sure the forecast will not change overnight, the decision is made the night before the event.

Delayed Opening Information

If conditions are such that work crews need extra time to plow the roads or sand the streets, the start of the school day will be delayed, usually by 90 minutes. There will be no morning half-day Kindergarten or morning Pre-School on days with a delayed opening. On a 90-minute delay day, schools will dismiss at their regular times. Lunch will be served at the regular times.

We remind parents not to attempt to send their children to school early on delayed opening days since the school driveways and school yards may not be plowed and no staff will be available to supervise early arrivals.

Early Dismissals

Under certain circumstances, it may be determined that inclement weather threatens to make the afternoon commute unsafe and an early dismissal from school is implemented. If such a decision is made prior to the school day commencing, families will be notified. A typical early release schedule will be in place for the day. As with other Early Release days, lunch will NOT be served. Notification will be made, as outlined below.

If the decision is made after the students have arrived for the day usually because of rapidly deteriorating weather conditions, families will be notified via the Walpole Public Schools telephone messaging system, on Twitter, on the district website, local TV and school specific email lists. In most scenarios the older students are released early to allow buses to run through their routes at a slower pace with the goal to have the elementary schools runs on time.

When the school system experiences an early dismissal all extracurricular activities, athletic practices and late busses are cancelled. Athletic competitive events will be determined on a case-by-case basis depending on the timing and venue.

Extended Day Cancellation and Delay Policy

When school is cancelled, Extended Day will also be cancelled. If there is a delay for the start of school, Extended Day will be delayed by the same amount of time. If schools are operating on an early release mode, Extended Day remains open until 4:00 p.m.

How is the Public Notified?

A recorded phone message will be sent to each family's primary phone contact. In addition, announcements will be carried starting at about 6:00 a.m. by television stations channels 4, 5, 7 and 25. A posting will be displayed on the Walpole Public Schools website (www.walpole.k12.ma.us). A message will also be sent via Twitter - "@WalpolePS".

Decisions are made in the best interest of the common good for all students, parents and employees. As you can see, there are numerous factors considered when adjusting the school schedule. The decision to close or not is never received with unanimous approval. The decision will always be made based upon information that is available at the time. Although modern science and technology have improved weather predicting capabilities, in the end Mother Nature has the final say. **Again, it is always the parent right to make the final decision as to whether to send their child to school in the case of predicted inclement weather event.** Tardiness and absenteeism with parent consent tied to safety factors will be considered "excused."