

FAQ: Schools and Winter Weather

Although, according to the calendar, we have just begun the winter season, the recent weather events have reminded all of us that living in the Northeast means working together to meet the challenges of Mother Nature. The efforts and cooperation of the entire community are needed to insure the safety of our students, especially during the winter months. The following information concerning the management of winter weather conditions is provided as a practical resource to parents and other members of the community.

Where does the information come from that is used to make decisions about inclement weather and school closing?

Throughout the year school administrators keep abreast of weather conditions as they relate to student and staff safety, but in the winter season that effort intensifies. If ice or snow is expected during the night, a careful monitoring of forecasts begins, including those found on local media and from the town DPW weather service. At approximately 4:00 a.m., the superintendent collects information on road conditions from school maintenance staff, the Weymouth Police, the Department of Public Works and the bus company. Also, superintendents from surrounding towns are contacted to determine how widespread the weather event may be. Among the things that must be considered is the variance in elevations in Weymouth and the differences in conditions that can be caused by that variation.

What factors are considered in making a decision to delay opening or to close school?

Safety is the primary concern in making a decision and a number of factors are considered including:

- Information on road conditions from the police, the DPW and our own staff who are plowing, sanding and shoveling
- The amount of snow on the ground or ice on the roads
- Weather predictions for accumulation of snow
- Availability of buses (bus yard cleared, vehicles will start)
- Conditions of school grounds (parking lots cleared)
- Building conditions (heat and lights)
- Temperature and wind-chill

If roads are snow covered or accumulation is expected to continue through the morning, a cancellation is likely. If snow ends early and crews need time to clear roads and lots, a two-hour delay in school opening is more likely.

Who makes the final decision?

The superintendent of schools is responsible for the final decision based on the above factors and after consultation with many individuals, the bus company and other town departments.

When is the decision made?

Every effort is made to make the decision by 5:30 a.m. so that radio and TV stations can be notified, the announcement can be placed on the cable channel and an AlertNow message can be sent to homes by 5:45 a.m.

How is the public notified?

The AlertNow telephone system is the primary method for notification to families if school is to be closed or a delayed-opening is to be implemented due to adverse weather conditions. Information is also available on major television channels (4, 5, 7, 25) and radio (WBZ 1030 am) as well as Weymouth cable channel 22. Unless it is an emergency, please do not call schools or the superintendent's office after a school closing or delay announcement because telephone lines could be tied up which may impede necessary communication with school personnel, road crews, and transportation staff.

Why is an early dismissal not implemented when weather becomes stormy later in the school day?

Several years ago, after consultation with school staff and the Town-wide Parent Council, guidelines were established to limit the use of early dismissal as an option when snow or ice begins in late morning or early afternoon, because of the significant number of families where adult supervision would not be available prior to the regular dismissal time. An early dismissal could send large numbers of children home to empty houses and, in some cases, students would not be able to get into their homes at all. Although stormy conditions may cause the ride home to be longer than usual, students will be safer given continuous adult supervision. However, parents always have the option of keeping children home or dismissing their child if snowy weather is predicted for the afternoon. If high snow accumulation is very probable in the afternoon, we will notify and encourage all parents to come to school and dismiss their child if they are able to do so. Should a scenario occur that would allow us to notify parents early in the morning (before 7 a.m.) that an early dismissal is necessary, that option could be exercised. Families are advised to have a back-up plan in the event that a parent or guardian would not be available to either pick-up or meet children who are returning home.

Why is school in session if sidewalks are not plowed?

There is no state law or town ordinance governing the removal of snow from sidewalks after a storm. Ideally, we would like to have all sidewalks cleared of snow and ice immediately following a storm, however, there are many hundreds of miles of sidewalks in Weymouth and the town has neither the manpower nor the equipment to complete that task in a day or two. A moderate storm, leaving six inches of snow, could close schools for three or four days if all sidewalks were plowed before re-opening. Because this is not practical, efforts are focused on sidewalks leading up to school entrances and at crosswalks. We ask for the cooperation of residents and business owners to remove snow on sidewalks in front of homes and buildings and ask that parents and students try to keep bus stop areas clear. If we work together as a community, we will be able to improve sidewalk conditions sooner. Parents always have the option of keeping a child home or driving them to school if they feel the child will not be safe traveling to school in the usual manner.