



Marple Newtown School District

November 2018

Dear Marple Newtown Families:

As the district begins to prepare for the upcoming winter season, I wanted to take this opportunity to review our weather/emergency closing process and procedures. While we understand the impact a school closing can have on our families and their routines, we must prioritize the safety of our students and staff when making any decision to close, delay start or dismiss early. In an effort to foster a better understanding of this process, I would like to provide answers to the most frequently asked questions.

How is the decision made?

Any decision to open or close schools is made after carefully considering the following:

- **Weather forecasts:** We prefer to not make our decision based solely on weather predictions, as we all know they are not always accurate. However, sometimes the weather forecast is presented in such an “aggressive manner”, making this decision based on the forecast is unavoidable.
- **Road conditions:** We must give careful consideration to the most dangerous roads in the district. Even if the roads in your neighborhood seem safe, other areas may be dangerous for travel.
- **Snow and ice accumulation:** We consider whether precipitation has been forecast to continue through the day and/or evening hours.
- **Building conditions:** Have the conditions affected our operations, i.e. loss of heat.
- **Parking lot conditions:** Our operations and transportation personnel work hard to clear and treat parking lots, sidewalks and building entrances.
- **Temperatures:** Extreme temperatures can render our salting and de-icing efforts relatively ineffective.
- **Surrounding Districts:** We share information with other local districts and check whether they are opening or closing.

What happens if snow/ice is expected or falls overnight?

If inclement weather is forecast or has fallen overnight, we deploy key staff members to evaluate the road conditions in our community. Our staff members evaluate the main roads and back roads that many of our buses must travel. The Director of Operations provides feedback to the Superintendent no later than 5:00 a.m. The Superintendent then participates in a County-wide conference call with colleagues. Road conditions around the county are shared. We try to gather enough information in order to make a decision no later than 5:30 a.m. If it has been determined that it is unsafe to open schools on time, or at all, the Superintendent directs designated staff to communicate the message out to families and staff through our various methods including the Infinite Campus Messenger. This timeframe allows us to communicate early enough to alert families and staff so they can make the necessary arrangements for the delay or cancellation.

Can't we make the decision the night before?

Sometimes it is possible to make that decision in the evening, but often we truly do not know until the morning. We try to avoid closing school the night before only to find the weather event has passed us by.

What happens if snow starts falling while school is in session?

This is perhaps the most difficult decision to make. In order for the district to prepare for an early dismissal, this decision must be made no later than 11:00 a.m., otherwise we must stay on our normal operating

schedule. Early dismissal follows the same dismissal procedure, high school, middle school, followed by the elementary schools. This allows the district the time necessary to cancel afternoon Kindergarten, and provide enough notice to our families to receive their children home early, and for our bus drivers to start the early dismissal process.

How does the district communicate the decision?

The most important method of communications is through the Infinite Campus Messenger. This program allows us to simultaneously send out phone calls, texts and emails to all families and staff. In fact, this program processes approximately 4,500 calls and 2,900 emails in a 15 to 20 minute timeframe. For each family, multiple phone numbers can be accessed automatically with voice and text messages about the state of school for that day. You can also check our website (www.mnsd.org), MNSD app, and the local media outlets.

What happens when the storm is over?

In all scenarios, once snow has stopped falling, the district is responsible to clear snow and ice at all seven (7) building locations. Additionally, we must clear the snow off of approximately 100 student transportation and maintenance vehicles so that they can be safely entered into service. Our employees are skilled and well equipped so that we can get schools ready to receive students and staff as soon as possible. However, there are times where the district is free of snow and ice, but road conditions are still not safe which can cause further delays or closings.

What does the district need from families?

To keep your contact information in Infinite Campus up to date at all times so that our communications reach you.

- 1) To prepare for weather/emergencies by having plans in place in case of school closures and early dismissals.
- 2) To please understand that we are making this decision for your child's safety and for no other reason.

How many snow days are built into the school calendar?

The 2018-2019 school calendar has three (3) snow days built into the academic year for all students K-12. Depending on the year, seniors may have fewer than 183 days due to the scheduling of graduation, however there are 183 days this year. By law, the district is required to provide 180 days of student instruction. Once we use our three (3) days that are "built-into" the current calendar, we must reevaluate the calendar, and schedule make-up days once we have exhausted the three days noted above. Starting with the 2018-2019 academic calendar, we have identified the potential make up days. To clear up any confusion, the district will use **ALL three (3)** "built-in" snow days before we start making up lost school days. Therefore, we will not start making up days until a fourth closure is warranted. Snow make up days are indicated on the calendar, however depending on the timing and number of days used, the district could be forced to extend the school year in June. We will be sure to communicate with all families and staff regarding the need for make-up days for students and/or staff.

I hope you find this communication was informative. If you have any questions or need any additional details, please contact your Building Principal and he or she will be able to assist you further.

Thank you all for your continued support and all that you do for our schools.

Warm regards,

Joe

Joseph Driscoll
Interim Superintendent of Schools