

## Frequently Asked Questions

### School Closing Decisions Due to Inclement Weather

#### **Who makes the decision?**

The Superintendent of Schools is responsible for making the final decision, based on recommendations from the Transportation Services Department Director and the Assistant Superintendent of Administration.

#### **How is the decision made?**

When the school system is advised by the weather service that storm conditions may exist, three or four Transportation Services Department officials are sent out at 3:00 a.m. to survey the roads. Each section of the county is driven to determine if the roads are, or will be, safe for children traveling on school buses. Transportation Services Department staff is in constant contact with weather stations, county and state government staff, police, and transportation officials in other counties, as well as each other, during the road and weather assessment.

While on the road, the following factors are used to develop the recommendation for closing schools:

- Existing road conditions across the entire county. Remember, even if your street or road looks clear, travel elsewhere in the county may be dangerous.
- Amount of snow and ice that has accumulated, whether it will continue, and the amount of time required for road crews to clear county roadways.
- Air temperature and road temperature.
- Weather predictions – the school system prefers not making a decision based on weather predictions, which are not always accurate; however, weather predictions are considered in combination with existing conditions.
- School parking lots, school sidewalks and school bus loops.
- Other traffic - other traffic can slide into buses or make waiting at bus stops dangerous.
- Will observed conditions likely improve or deteriorate?

#### **How is the public notified?**

The Carroll County Public School System notifies parents and employees through SchoolMessenger phone calls and emails. Parents and employees may also opt to be sent a text message. Announcements are also placed on the school system's website at [www.carrollk12.org](http://www.carrollk12.org) and posted on Facebook, Twitter, and CETV Channel 21. In addition, local and regional radio and televisions are contacted. You can find the list of radio and television stations contacted in the CCPS Informational Calendar Handbook.

When is the decision made?

The decision to delay or close schools must be made no later than 6:00 a.m. in order to notify bus contractors, radio and television stations, send a SchoolMessenger notification and post the decision on the CCPS website, social media, and Channel 21. However, every effort will be made to make the decision as early as possible.

### **Will we close schools when weather conditions worsen?**

When the decision is made to open schools on time and buses have already begun to pick up students, parents rely on this decision and in many cases leave for work.

Once students arrive at school and weather conditions worsen, it may be necessary to dismiss students early. In these cases, the school system will give adequate notice to parents using the procedures outlined under "How is the public notified?" A decision to close schools three hours early will be made by 10:00 am, a decision to close two hours early will be made by 11:00 am, and a decision to close one hour early will be made by 12:00 pm.

### **How does a re-evaluation work?**

There may be an announcement made that schools will open 2 hours late with a "re-evaluation." Parents and employees will receive a second communication by 7:30 a.m. notifying them of the final decision on whether schools will open late or close for the day.

### **How safe are school buses in inclement weather?**

Since 2002, all new Carroll County Public School buses have been equipped with automatic tire chains which can be easily activated and de-activated by the driver flipping a switch in the driver's compartment. Older buses are equipped with manual chains, which all drivers are trained to properly install. In addition, school buses have rear- tandem all-weather tires, anti-lock braking systems and heated mirrors. School buses weigh in excess of 20,000 pounds, making them one of the safest vehicles in inclement weather.

### **What kind of training do bus drivers have for inclement weather conditions?**

School bus drivers are licensed by the Maryland Motor Vehicle Administration with a CDL B with Passenger, School Bus and Air Brake endorsements. All drivers receive extensive in-the-classroom and behind-the-wheel instruction. Drivers are thoroughly trained in inclement weather driving techniques such as reducing the speed of the bus, avoiding sudden stops, activating the strobe light, driving with headlights on, remaining extra vigilant at intersections and proper steering techniques in the event of a skid.

### **Why doesn't Carroll County have weather zones?**

Unlike some counties that do have weather zones, Carroll County's weather conditions typically do not vary significantly enough to justify creating weather zones. For instance, the conditions in the Hereford (northern Baltimore County) Zone can vary greatly from those in southern Baltimore County. In fact, the conditions in a storm throughout Carroll County typically resemble the conditions in the Hereford Zone of Baltimore County. In Frederick County, the elevations of their mountainous areas tend to make winter weather more severe. The elevations in Carroll County are fairly similar, with the highest elevated areas running from the southwest part of the county in Mt. Airy, northeastward through Westminster and continuing all the way to the far northeastern section of the county. In addition, there are numerous county-wide programs which require students to be transported from all parts of the county to Westminster area schools. Also, the feeder patterns for elementary, middle and high schools

in Carroll County do not provide clean, geographical boundaries to permit regional weather zones. For more information, please read the additional information provided on weather zones in this website.

### **Who is responsible for clearing ice and snow from my street?**

Town roads are cleared by municipalities, county roads are cleared by Carroll County Roads and state roads are cleared by the State Highway Administration.

### **How long does it take to plow and salt county and state roadways?**

#### COUNTY ROADS

- It takes three to four hours to spread salt on all of the roads.
- It takes eight to ten hours to plow the roads once for an average snowstorm.
- There are 84 (trucks) different routes.
- There are 980 miles of roads.

#### STATE ROADS

- It takes up to four hours to plow once.
- It takes up to four to five hours after snow fall to plow to the pavement.
- There are 23 different trucks used for an average storm. More are available if needed, depending on the storm.
- There are 990 lane-miles of state roads within Carroll County.

### **What consideration is given for students walking to and from the bus stop?**

The decision to alter the school schedule due to inclement weather is based on road conditions as evaluated and explained in Frequently Asked Questions "How is the decision made?" Students are expected to walk to the designated bus stop with parental supervision. The responsibility to clear sidewalks and driveways rests with the individual property owner. Please refer to CCPS Board of Administrators Regulation EEAC: Bus Routes and Stops for more information

### **Are student drivers considered in the decision to delay, close or dismiss schools early?**

Students are encouraged to ride the school bus when inclement weather is predicted. The decision to delay, close or dismiss schools early is based primarily on the safety of students riding school buses.

Please discourage student drivers from driving home from school in adverse weather conditions.

### **What is my responsibility during inclement weather?**

It is recommended that students ride the bus to school. Studies show that students are at least 100 times safer riding to and from school on the bus than being transported in personal vehicles. In addition, heavy congestion in the parent drop-off and pick-up areas can complicate traffic patterns in and around schools.

- Parents should park their cars at least 30 feet away from the bus stop to improve visibility and reduce congestion.
- Parents should wait safely with their children at the bus stop to ensure their safety.
- Students should be waiting for the bus as it approaches and should not run to the bus. Running to the bus increases the possibility the child could slip and fall in icy conditions.
- Parents should make sure students are appropriately dressed for the weather conditions while waiting at the bus stop.