

Help! We're cancelling our event!

How can we tell the world?

When bad weather or an emergency forces school closings and delays, the Communication Services Division often gets calls from administrators who want us to notify the public of cancelled meetings, field trips and the like. Here's how we can (and can't) help:



1. Will the Communication Services Division notify the media for us when our school or department cancels a field trip or meeting?

Generally, no. As a rule, Communication Services communicates news of **systemwide** importance or when an **emergency** situation affects an entire school community. Given that FCPS has 60+ schools and many departments—each with its own schedule of field trips, football games and curriculum meetings—it is impossible for one office to handle individual schedule changes that occur when school is closed.

2. Okay, then how can we get the word out?

First, consider the significance and impact of the change. Who is affected? How large is the group? Is it a class, team or committee? Is it all your school's students or parents, or hundreds of teachers or students coming from around the county?

- ◆ **Phone, email or PA announcement** — Use these when your audience is relatively small and you have contact information for them. For a field trip cancellation, for instance, make calls. A band director can contact members about a cancelled competition. Use the PA system to tell students tonight's game is cancelled.
- ◆ **Voicemail** — Add notice to your usual greeting. For example, *"You've reached Snowstorm High School. Today is January 30, 2008. School closed early today, at 1 p.m. All after-school and evening activities are cancelled. For information about make-up dates, please contact the activity sponsor."* (Remember, you can change your VM greeting from any phone. And make a note to revert to your usual VM greeting the next morning.)
- ◆ **FCPS email distribution lists** — Perfect for groups such as Guidance Counselors or Principals or all employees at a school. You can reach everyone with the same message using the appropriate distribution group. If the cancellation impacts employees at many locations throughout FCPS but you don't have their names or email addresses, send your notice to all KeyCommunicators (or KeyCommunicatorsCentral or KeyCommunicatorsSchools) and ask them to forward the news to appropriate staff. Every school and office has a Key Communicator.
- ◆ **Your school's Web site** — Post a notice. Don't forget to date it, and remove it when it's no longer current.
- ◆ **FCPS TV Channel 18** — Use only to announce items that have wide-reaching impact and/or pertain to external audiences (such as a Board of Education meeting or a Back-to-School Night). Email dian.nelson@fcps.org or fax to 301-696-6958; copy your email to peggy.ballew@fcps.org. If you are postponing rather than cancelling, give the new date.



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- ◆ **Local radio stations** — Local radio stations will typically announce cancellations of events such as school plays or Parents Nights. Regional radio and most TV stations will not. Go to <http://insidefcps/dept/comm/medialist.pdf> (on the Intranet) for media contact information, and make the calls or send a fax direct from your desk. Be prepared to identify yourself.



3. Can we put our school's postponement announcements on www.fcps.org? Or send it via Find Out First email?

These are usually limited to news of systemwide or wide-scale significance.

For instance, they are not venues to announce a cancelled sporting event. In the case of Find Out First, emails can go to parents who have subscribed and indicated that they have a student at your school; however, delivery times vary significantly depending on a subscriber's Internet provider. If you're interested in communicating via Find Out First, email dian.nelson@fcps.org, with a copy to peggy.ballew@fcps.org. At the school level, this request must come from the principal.

4. During bad weather season, what can we do to plan for possible cancellations?

- ◆ Choose a snow or rain date in advance and include it in all your communications to participants.
- ◆ Adhere to the "What Schools Do in Bad Weather and Emergencies" guidelines on page 5 of the Calendar Handbook. Let participants know in advance that the guidelines will apply to your event.
- ◆ Refer to FCPS Regulation 400-2 (available at www.fcps.org), and let participants know in advance that it will apply to your event.
- ◆ Provide a name and number for participants to call if they have questions.
- ◆ Appoint someone to make cancellation/rescheduling decisions and publicize them. If an event is taking place at a particular school, make sure you know who can update the school's voice-mail message (from a remote location) to alert callers to a cancellation.

5. What is the FCPS/Board policy about after-school and evening activities on days when school is closed for weather or other emergency situations?

When schools are closed all day or dismissed early, all after-school and evening activities are cancelled, including events scheduled by outside groups (except daycare centers operating in FCPS facilities, which independently make decisions regarding modifications to their program schedules and communicate accordingly with the media, the principal and the families they serve).

In addition, as stated in FCPS Regulation 400-2, except for the daycare centers referenced above: "When the snow emergency plan is in effect in Frederick County, all after-school, evening and weekend programs and activities shall be cancelled." This applies to evening instructional programs such as Flexible Evening High School and the Heather Ridge Twilight Program.

In rare circumstances, the superintendent may grant a waiver for schools to hold an event even though the system is closed. Requests should be made to the appropriate associate superintendent who will then review the matter with the superintendent.

