

How FCPS Decides to Cancel or Delay School in Emergency Situations

The determination to close or delay school is a difficult one that involves assessment of a variety of factors from several sources in a compressed time period. The primary consideration is always the safety of students and bus drivers. The most important secondary consideration is the impact on instructional time for students.

The FCPS Transportation Department's knowledge of developing inclement weather begins with current status reports. We may receive these reports hourly if the situation warrants. Staff also has computer access to real-time radar images of weather movement. In addition, calls to school transportation staffs in neighboring counties — in the direction from which the weather is coming — provide helpful details about the conditions they are experiencing.

On mornings when conditions are in question, staff typically disperses throughout Frederick County by 3:30 or 4 a.m. to personally assess road conditions. We contact County and State highway departments for their observations and their plans to use staff, salt, cinders and equipment to clear roads and streets.

All of this effort is designed to determine — by 5 a.m. — if we will be able to transport thousands of students to school that day and whether walkers can navigate their routes within acceptable safety standards.

Beyond the principal concern of safety, we also want to maximize instructional time. Years of experience have demonstrated that the procedures outlined above are the most practical methods to address student safety and instructional concerns.

It has been suggested that FCPS consider changing this procedure so that we announce delays the night before, then re-assess the situation the next morning. Experience has taught us there are many occasions when forecasts the night before predict far worse conditions than actually materialize the next morning.

The Transportation Department takes very seriously the responsibility to delay or close schools. While FCPS recognizes that a change in a child's school schedule does create inconvenience for many families, those responsible for transportation make every effort to make an informed decision in a timely manner.