



Morris School District
Office of the Superintendent
31 Hazel Street, Morristown, NJ 07960

November 13, 2018

Dear Parents and Guardians,

With an impending storm arriving Thursday the winter weather season has arrived which, in NJ, means difficult and challenging road conditions for the next few months. The decision to have an early dismissal, delay, open or close schools when bad weather strikes is a difficult one that must take many factors into account. While we believe continuity in attendance best serves our students, the guiding principle during weather events is always student safety. The following summary is designed to shed light on how weather-closing decisions are made.

How and when are parents notified of school closing decisions?

In most cases a Honeywell Instant Alert notification will be sent between 5:00 a.m. and 5:30 a.m. when the decision to delay opening or to close school is made; although, sometimes the notification is sent out the night before depending upon certain variables. **Parents are encouraged to review contact information in their Honeywell account. If parents have not registered their contact information in their Honeywell account they need to do so immediately in order to receive notifications.** Instructions can be found on the Morris School District website (www.morrisschooldistrict.org) and on each school website.

What factors are considered when making snow-closing decisions?

- **Weather Conditions and Forecasts** – We receive information regarding weather conditions from the Morris County Office of Emergency Management, District Building and Grounds personnel, and from a private weather service that provides targeted data specific to our local area. Of course, no forecast is ever perfect because weather is dynamic. Subtle changes in the temperature at 4:00 am can result in dramatic changes in road conditions by 8:00 am. To this end, we work hard to gather the best available and most accurate information possible.
- **Road Conditions throughout the District** – Our District covers more than 30 square miles, stretching from the border of Madison to Mendham and Randolph. Elevations – and therefore weather conditions – vary dramatically from one area of our District to another. The more well-traveled/main roads in one area or neighborhood may be clear, while more rural, less-traveled roads may be snow covered or slick with ice. When making weather-closing decisions, *the conditions of roads and sidewalks that will affect the safety of students in all areas of the District must be considered.*
- **School Building and Parking Lot Conditions** – Snow and ice must be removed from parking lots and sidewalks to ensure the safety of students, staff, and visitors.
- **Availability of Buses** – Buses must be cleared of ice and snow before they begin their runs. The Morris School District contracts with some independent bus companies to transport our

students. Therefore, we must also consult with those companies to determine if those buses are available to safely transport students when making snow-closing decisions.

- **Availability of Staff** – Many members of our staff travel long distances and may be unable to get to school given weather conditions on highways.

When is the decision made to close or delay school?

Generally, the decision to close or delay the opening of school is made between 4:30 a.m. and 5:30 so that proper communication can take place.

How are school hours adjusted if there is a delayed opening or early dismissal?

When there is a delayed opening, all schools will open 2 hours later than usual. Buses will also be delayed by 2 hours. There is no Sunrise Program when there is a delayed-opening. If there is an early dismissal, MHS will dismiss at 12:10; Lafayette and K-2 schools will dismiss at 1:00; Normandy will dismiss at 1:15; and 3-5 schools will dismiss at 1:25.

Should I allow my child to drive him/herself to school during inclement weather?

Generally speaking, NO. Student drivers are inexperienced. Although we do our best to make appropriate and safe decisions, it is impossible to know every slick corner, area of black ice or untreated road. Statistically, experience counts. During inclement weather, we advise all students to be transported to school through the use of our buses or other adult driver. If this is not possible and you feel it is not safe for your child to travel to school, then, certainly, use your best judgment.

What if weather conditions shift suddenly and worsen? We are aware that reversing a decision can cause significant disruptions within a household and the community. However, weather is dynamic and, therefore, our school closing decisions may need to change to ensure everyone's safety. For example, a few degrees difference in temperature may turn rain into ice. Moreover, a storm may stall or move faster than originally forecast which can produce significantly more snow on the roads than anticipated at 4:30 AM. In these instances, it is possible a delayed-opening may turn into a school closing. We will try to notify the public by 7:15 AM if this occurs. Additionally, if we decide on an early dismissal we will notify the public by 10:15 AM for a midday closing.

When it comes to weather issues there are often no perfect solutions. If you do not feel as though it is safe for your child to attend school then use your best judgment. In the end, please know our district staff continues to diligently work in a comprehensive manner so that we can make the best decision for our community.

Thank you.

Mackey Pendergrast
Superintendent of Schools