

Inclement or threatening weather: How does the SAU make the decision to cancel school or issue a delayed start due to weather?

Determining school cancellations and late starts is taken very seriously by the administration of SAU 70 and the Dresden, Hanover and Norwich School Districts. Our students, employees, and bus driver's safety is of utmost concern. Because we are a collaboration of integrated school districts, we must be consistent in cancellations and late starts across all three. We currently contract with Student Transportation of Vermont to provide transportation services to our districts. They employ the drivers and own the buses, which carry our District's names on them. We currently run 13 regular in-town routes and many additional special routes across many different types of terrain and elevations. Many of our 450 District employees travel from towns near and far via highways and secondary roads.

In order to account for the different weather conditions depending upon location and keep everyone safe, we follow many steps before a decision is made to close school or start school late. Close attention is paid to the weather every evening during the winter months. As soon as the National Weather Service issues a storm advisory, we begin watching the national and local weather channels as well as Doppler radar via the Internet. Tracking active storms is done all night long in preparation for possible school closings.

We also base our decision on the following extremely important factors:

- Temperature, including wind chill factor
- Number of inches and timing of projected snowfall
- Freezing rain and/or icy conditions
- Wind velocity impacting the blowing and drifting of snow, along with visibility issues
- Buses running routes at a slower pace having an impact on the length of time students may be waiting at bus stops
- Parents driving their sons/daughters in poor driving conditions and high school age students with little experience driving

A decision to close schools or start late must be made by 5:45 am [actually with 2023 route updates this is now 5:30 am], as buses begin picking up students at 6:45 am. At about 5:15 [now actually 5:00 am] am the Business Administrator contacts the district's police and highway departments as well as the transportation company to determine road conditions. Drivers who live in various district locations are polled about conditions of their roads as well. The Business Administrator, Transportation Manager of STV/A and Superintendent then consider all the information that has been gathered to decide.

Late starts are used when we are seeing the end of a storm and highway departments have advised that the extra time can aid in the clean-up. It also provides better visibility for drivers during daylight. Late starts will normally be a two-hour delay from your normal school start. For example, if your child's school normally starts at 8:00 am, a late start causes the school day to begin at 10:00 am. When school is canceled or evening activities are canceled, it is important to contact your child's after-school program providers to see if they too are closing early or canceling their programs. Our decisions do not necessarily affect programs run by the individual towns. Once a decision is made to close school or start late, a District "phone-tree" goes into effect, which notifies District parents, employees, radio and television stations.

Unless there are unusual circumstances, SAU 70 and its Districts will not implement early dismissals for bad weather situations. An early dismissal introduces the risk of sending a young student home to an empty house. We believe that knowing students are inside, safe, warm and learning is far better than sending them home to an empty house. However, it is important to remember that you are the parent and know what is best for your child. If you believe your child would be safer at home in poor weather conditions, your young learner's absence will be marked as excused. Likewise, if uncomfortable with the weather conditions throughout a poor-weather day as you access the weather conditions, we would encourage you to act upon that belief, communicate with your school's principal, and make the necessary arrangements to pick up your child.

Overall, buses are very safe modes of transportation. Drivers can and do pull over to call for on the spot sand deliveries should conditions warrant. Please encourage your teenager to ride the bus during inclement weather rather than drive. They are safer having an experienced driver take them to school.

What may appear to be a simple decision, as you can tell, includes many components: transportation, communications, before/after school child care programs within and outside of our elementary schools, the timing of the decision, road crews, the transportation company and the bus drivers. The decisions to close school are based on the ability of the buses to safely and efficiently transport students and the ability of our employees and student drivers to arrive safely at school and home again. Ultimately, the decision lies with the superintendent and it is, indeed, a difficult one, but like you, our first priority is to ensure the safety of our students. Although some may choose to disagree, we will never compromise that basic principle when making the decision, and we support your decision in keeping children home if and when you find it necessary. It is often a judgment call and we strive to do the best we can for everyone involved.

In an effort to cut down on cancelations, we have reviewed all of our bus routes to determine which have proven especially difficult to navigate on poor-weather days. Approximately 20% of the terrain falls into this category. After speaking with our School Boards, we have been working with our transportation provider to make temporary suspension of certain route stops and use "weather-advisory stops" during days of

severe weather conditions. If bad weather presents this type of situation and you live on one of these route sections, we will notify you via email of the alternative pick up or drop off locations in advance of the buses running, unless it's an emergency situation that arises during the course of a route, then notification will occur as soon as it's possible.

The winter weather advisory procedure will work as follows:

If you live in a section of town or on a road that has historically proven difficult passage on weather-advisory days, we would notify you by 6:00 am that we cannot make it to your regular stop, but will pick your student(s) up at an alternative listed location. Or you may choose to bring the student to school with your own vehicle, or choose to keep the student home.

How does the SAU communicate changes in school openings?

If school is to be closed due to inclement weather conditions, announcements will be broadcast on WMUR TV9, WGXL (92.3 FM), WTSL (AM 1400/ Hot 97.5 FM), WWOD (93.9 The River) WXXK (KIXX 100.5) KOOL Oldies (106.7/96.3 FM) WHDQ (Q106.1 FM) WXLF (95.3/107.1 The WOLF) ESPN-WTSV (94.3 FM/94.5 FM) WNTK (1020 AM/ 1490 AM 99.7 FM/ 98.9 FM), WRJT (The Point 103.1) WFRD (99 ROCK). This announcement will normally be made by 6:00 A.M. School closing information is also posted on WMUR TV's website www.wmur.com, and on WCAX TV's website www.wcax.com.

The District also operates an automatic call and email system (school messenger) that will notify parents on days when there are school cancellations and delays. This automatic call/email will normally be initiated by 6:00 a.m., or shortly thereafter. If you are not receiving these calls (emails), or if you would like to receive them at a different phone number (email address), or you would like NOT to receive those phone calls (emails), please contact your school's secretary. Delayed Openings and pick up times if, for weather or other reasons, a two-hour delay is called, all school related schedules will be moved two hours later. Therefore, if your child customarily waits for a bus at 7:20 a.m., he or she should wait for the bus at 9:20 a.m. If your child's school's start time is 8:00 a.m., the starting time will change to 10:00 a.m. If a two-hour delay has been announced as described above, and it is later determined that conditions have NOT improved and schools will be closed, an announcement to that effect will be made on the radio and TV stations listed above before 8:00 a.m. Continue to monitor radio stations and the web in case school is subsequently canceled.