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## Cancelling/Delaying School Decision Making Process Message From Superintendent Rundle

1 message

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## MERCER ISLAND SCHOOL DISTRICT #400

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Fred Rundle, Superintendent  
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Dear Mercer Island Community,

I grew up in the mountains west of Denver, Colorado at an elevation of 9,000 feet. Living with the snow was like rain here in the Pacific Northwest. In Seattle, we joke that only tourists use umbrellas. In Denver, they joke that only tourists use tire chains. When it comes to snow and rain the cities could not be any different. Knowing I am from Colorado, you are likely wondering how in the world we had a snow day on Thursday, so let me give you an overview of what goes into making a decision about whether to close school, delay the start, or keep schools open. While I know that not everyone will always agree with the choice I make, I do want everyone to know how it is made and that the ultimate factor comes down to safety.

### Prior to a Snow Event

Before the snow even starts, our Director of Transportation and Director of Maintenance and Operations start preparing by:

- Tracking the storm using various sources;
- Treating parking lots and walkways around the schools; and
- Discussing plans with the City of Mercer Island.

I meet with the Executive Director of Finance and Operations, Director of Transportation, Director of Maintenance and Operations, and Communications Coordinator to discuss what we are learning and the potential impact on schools.

### Snow Events While Students and Staff are at School

If the snow begins when students are in school our team begins driving around Mercer Island to monitor conditions. Temperatures before the storm, the current temperature, and predicted future temperatures help determine what we might expect the accumulation to be on the roads and sidewalks. We work very hard to avoid a situation where students are at school and we either have to call school early or cannot get them home using buses.

This Wednesday was a perfect example of how things play out when students are at school. Knowing that it was an early release for middle and elementary students, we were confident that those afternoon routes would be safe for travel. The storm hit a little earlier and with

more vigor than anticipated, which is why we released high school students an hour early. This was intended to get our student drivers and staff a little extra time to get home.

### **Snow Events When Students and Staff are Not at School**

If the snow starts falling during the weekend, in the evening, overnight, or in the early morning, our team meets frequently. If we can, we announce a delay or cancellation before people go to bed. For example, on Wednesday evening our team notified me that they would need extra time to prepare the schools for Thursday morning. We also knew that areas to the north, east, and south where our staff would be commuting from were impacted. Thus, I made the call Wednesday evening for a two-hour delay (more to come on why I called a full snow day later).

Our team typically meets about 8:00 PM the night before a school day to discuss current conditions, any changes in the forecast, and the plan for the next morning. The day begins quite early, as our team:

- Drives the Island beginning around 4:30 AM;
- Checks-in as a full team at 5:00 AM and then checks-in every half hour;
- Monitors FlashAlert from other school districts and or reaches out to colleagues;
- Communicates with the City; and
- Contacts our MISD Substitute Coordinator to determine staff impact, because they commute from Puyallup to Edmonds, North Bend to Bremerton, and everywhere in between.

Our goal is to make a determination about whether to delay school, close school, or to remain open two-hours before the first school starts (MIHS on M,T,Th,F and IMS on W).

### **Key Variables Driving the Decision to Ensure Safety**

While each storm seems to pose its own challenges, the variables we primarily take into consideration include but are not limited to:

- Current and forecasted precipitation;
- Timing of precipitation;
- Past, current, and future temperatures;
- Conditions on the main roads (Island Crest, East Mercer, West Mercer, etc.), parking lots, sidewalks, and neighborhoods;
- Weather impact in the cities and communities where our staff live;
- Substitute availability; and
- The decisions of the neighboring districts due to the impact on our staff.

### **Why did I Change from a Two-Hour Delay to Full Closure on Thursday?**

When we checked in at 6:00 AM, four hours before the start of MIHS, the custodian and maintenance and operation teams felt very positive about opening according to the delay. Credit to the City or Mercer Island and our crews for their efforts to treat the roads, break up ice that formed overnight, and prepare for the day.

With Bellevue, Snoqualmie, and Tahoma School Districts already closed, I turned my attention to our substitute status and commutes for staff. The snow picked up right about 6:45 AM and was predicted to last into the morning before the storm would clear. Issaquah, Kent, and a couple of other districts then closed. With the snow coming down on the ice we were trying to mitigate, staff starting their commutes in difficult conditions, and other staff calling in to report absences, I made the difficult decision to close our schools. As a Colorado kid, it was not a simple decision, but given the circumstances I made what I thought was the best for everyone.

### **Why did we not have a Two-Hour Delay Today (Friday)?**

The City had done a tremendous job overnight pretreating the roads and our crews had done the same last night to the sidewalks and areas around schools. The forecasted precipitation was not blanketing the region, which we knew would help our staff. We felt that given the

short duration of the anticipated snow (6:30 to 8:30), ice/snow mitigation products pre applied, and the warming temperatures transportation to school would not be impacted. This proved to be the case, as our bus drivers returned from the morning routes and did not have issues.

I hope everyone has a nice weekend and the rains return! For those who may not have received earlier communications about how to get information about school delays and closures, I included information previously distributed below.

Respectfully,

Fred Rundle  
Superintendent

We want to remind you where to look for school closure and delay information. The Mercer Island School District communicates information on school closures and delays in a variety of ways, all listed below. We have created a [Snow Closure Information page on our website](#) that explains the District's inclement weather plan, how we decide to delay or cancel school, and provides the same communication information below.

- **FlashAlert-** FlashAlert is the platform School Districts use to communicate school closure information to local TV and radio stations. You can sign up to [receive a FlashAlert email and/or text](#). You can download the FlashAlert mobile app on [iOS](#) or [Android](#) and enable the app to send you push notifications on school closures and delays.
- **Text Messaging-** Families can opt-in to receive text notifications from our School Messenger system about school closures. To receive text notifications, first, we recommend you [log-in to your Skyward account](#), select "Family Access", and click on the "Skylert" link to verify your cell phone number is listed correctly to receive text notifications. The instructions on this ["Skylert" instruction sheet \(PDF\)](#) show you how to confirm your cell phone number. Once you have verified your number in "Skylert" you can text "Y" to 67587 to receive notifications from School Messenger, [as these instructions show \(PDF\)](#).
- **Email-** Our School Messenger system will send an email to District families and students about closures.
- **Website-** The MISD [website](#) will show information.
- **Social Media-** MISD social media platforms will be updated with information. [Twitter](#) | [Facebook](#) | [Instagram](#)
- **Local Media-** Local radio and TV stations also will provide information regarding school closures.

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