

# Superintendent's Corner

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# Superintendent's Update

As we enter the winter season, now seems like a good time to share insight into the decision-making process for when inclement weather or hazardous conditions alter our normal school day operations. This decision is never easy and requires much deliberation. The size and diversity of Montgomery County adds to the difficulty as one area of the county may be experiencing severe weather while another part is unfazed. Below is the process we use to make this determination.

The decision-making process for a school superintendent to close schools due to inclement weather during the winter months in southwest Virginia involves several key factors, with a focus on ensuring the safety of students, staff, and the community. This process typically follows a series of steps:

## 1. Monitoring Weather Conditions

As superintendent, I begin by staying informed about the weather forecast from various reliable sources, including local meteorologists, the National Weather Service, and weather apps. I pay close attention to winter storm warnings, snow or ice accumulation predictions, temperatures, and any changes in weather patterns that could affect road conditions or school operations.

## 2. Consulting with Local Experts

We then collaborate with local transportation and public safety officials, including VDOT, law enforcement, and emergency management teams. These individuals provide firsthand information about road conditions, traffic hazards, and the ability of local agencies to keep roads clear and safe for buses and other vehicles.

## 3. Evaluating Road and School Conditions

We also often have designated personnel who drive the roads in the early morning to assess conditions. This includes evaluating whether secondary roads (which may not be as well-maintained) are passable for buses and if school parking lots and sidewalks are clear of ice or snow. We consider the difficulty in transporting students, especially those in rural areas or on hilly terrain.



# Superintendent's Update

## 4. Communication with Other Superintendents

In most cases, we may contact neighboring districts or those in similar weather zones to discuss conditions and potential closures. This helps ensure consistency and allows for collaboration on the best approach to handling inclement weather across the region.

## 5. Considering Student and Staff Safety

We prioritize the safety of both students and staff, considering the challenges that severe weather might present. This includes evaluating the risks of bus routes, roadways, and the safety of children walking to school or waiting at bus stops. Concerns about the health risks of extended exposure to extreme cold or hazardous driving conditions are also taken into account.

## 6. Making the Decision

After gathering all relevant information, we decide whether to close schools, delay opening, or dismiss early. This decision is often made in the early morning hours, typically by 5:00-5:30 AM, in order to inform families, staff, and the public in a timely manner. In extreme weather cases, the decision may involve a more proactive approach, such as closing schools the night before to allow families to plan ahead.

## 7. Communicating the Decision

Once a decision is made, we communicate it quickly and clearly to parents, staff, and the broader community. This is usually done through multiple channels, including the school district website, social media platforms, text message alerts, automated phone calls, and local news outlets. Ensuring that families receive timely updates is critical, especially in rural or mountainous areas where weather conditions can change rapidly.

## 8. Contingency Planning



# Superintendent's Update

Finally, We must also prepare for potential follow-up actions. This might include coordinating with school maintenance teams to address any ice or snow accumulation on school grounds or preparing for reopening. We also do our best to ensure families in need of breakfast and lunch meals are afforded opportunities to access this food.

Throughout this process, we do our best to balance logistical considerations with the responsibility of protecting the safety and well-being of students, staff, and the community, all while keeping the public informed and minimizing disruption to the educational calendar.

We hope this clarifies the process and provides some insight into how we determine if schools should be closed due to inclement weather.

On behalf of the entire Montgomery County Public Schools community, I hope you have a great holiday season and enjoy the break.

Sincerely,

Dr. Bernard F. Bragen, Jr.  
Superintendent



# Virginia Tech Baseball Visits CES

The Virginia Tech Baseball team took a field trip to Christiansburg High School to read to the students. Students were able to ask questions about playing sports at Virginia Tech.

<https://youtu.be/EZrmqM2gbGA>

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## Quality Food for Quality Students

MCPS School Nutrition has partnered with Sodexo to provide nutritious and tasty meals for our students this year.

[https://youtu.be/A3C8\\_pnY4sM](https://youtu.be/A3C8_pnY4sM)

#WeAreMCPS



# Curriculum & Instruction Update

Dear Families,

As our first semester comes to a close, I want to take a moment to celebrate the incredible efforts of our students, staff, and families. Together, we've navigated the opportunities and challenges of the school year with resilience and determination, and we've seen remarkable growth both in and out of the classroom. Your support plays a vital role in this success, and we are truly grateful for your partnership.

The transition from first to second semester is a time of reflection and renewal. It's an opportunity to celebrate accomplishments, set goals, and make adjustments to ensure a strong finish to the school year. Here are a few ways you can help your child prepare for success in the second semester:

## Celebrate Progress

Take time to recognize your child's hard work and achievements from the first half of the school year. Whether it's academic progress, personal growth, or extracurricular accomplishments, celebrating these milestones builds confidence and motivation.

## Set Clear Goals

Encourage your child to set specific, achievable goals for the second semester. These might include improving a grade in a challenging subject, developing better study habits, or participating in a new activity. Writing down goals and revisiting them regularly can keep students focused and on track.

## Build Good Habits

The new semester is the perfect time to reinforce healthy routines. Ensure your child gets adequate sleep, maintains a consistent homework schedule, and takes time to unwind. These habits create a strong foundation for learning.

Engage! Encourage! Empower!







# Curriculum & Instruction Update

## Stay Connected

Communication is key. Stay informed about your child's progress by checking their grades, attending parent-teacher conferences, and reaching out to teachers if you have concerns. Engaging in school events and activities is another great way to stay involved.

## Encourage a Growth Mindset

Remind your child that challenges are opportunities to learn and grow. Celebrate effort and persistence, and help them see mistakes as stepping stones toward success.

As we move into the second semester, our commitment remains the same: to provide every student with the tools and support they need to succeed. From our dedicated teachers and staff to the innovative programs we're implementing, we are focused on fostering an environment where all students can thrive.

Thank you for your continued support and involvement in your child's education. Together, we can make the second semester a time of achievement and growth for every student.

Wishing you a very happy holiday season and a successful start to the new semester,

Dr. Barbara M. Wickham

# Chemistry is Cool

Dr. Webster, from Radford University visited with Ms. Sharp-Knott's chemistry classes at Auburn High School. Dr. Webster showed off chemical reactions of all sizes for the students. Check it out!

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gg98uXmY7kM>

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## ASL Cooking Show

The American Sign Language III class at EMHS put their communication and cooking skills to the test. Students had to cook an entire meal while only communicating with their peers through ASL.



Engage! Encourage! Empower!







## Celebrating December Holidays

As December unfolds, our schools are alive with the joy and excitement of the holiday season. This time of year offers us a special opportunity to unite as a community, honoring the diverse traditions, cultures, and experiences that enrich our school division. We are committed to ensuring that every student, family, and staff member feels valued, respected, and included in our celebrations and reflections.

In classrooms and school events, students and staff may be engaging in meaningful ways to celebrate the holidays while honoring the unique identities of our community members. From exploring cultural traditions such as Hanukkah, Christmas, Kwanzaa, and Las Posadas to recognizing non-religious ways of marking the season, we aim to foster an environment where every student sees their story reflected and respected.

Our teachers may create opportunities for students to share their family traditions and learn about others, building empathy and understanding across differences. These activities remind us that inclusivity strengthens our community and deepens our connections with one another.

This season also brings opportunities to live out our values of equity and compassion. Many of our schools are hosting food and clothing drives, ensuring that all families in our division can experience the joy and comfort of the holidays.

We recognize that the holiday season can also bring challenges for some in our community. Our school counselors, family liaisons, and community partners are here to support families with resources and services to meet their needs. Together, we are committed to creating a school environment where every family feels supported and empowered.

Gyulene Wood-Setzer  
Director of Equity and Diversity

Resources  
Hanukkah: [My Jewish Learning](#), [Chabad](#), [History](#)

Christmas: [History](#), [English Heritage](#), [Museum of Arts & Sciences](#)

Kwanzaa: [Natural Museum of African American History](#), [History](#), [PBS NewsHour](#)

Las Posadas: [Journey Mexico](#), [Wonderopolis](#), [History](#)

# #WeAreMCPS

# Battle for the Belt

Auburn Elementary School has a school wide contest for weekly attendance. The class with the highest attendance rate gets to flaunt the WWE style Attendance Belt. Students say this weekly contest encourages students to come to school every day.



## BHS Thanksgiving Baskets

Blacksburg High School's SCA donated hundreds of Thanksgiving baskets to the MCPS community and beyond. The yearly project provides all the ingredients for a full Thanksgiving meal.

<https://youtu.be/FSDaX-A8k1Y>

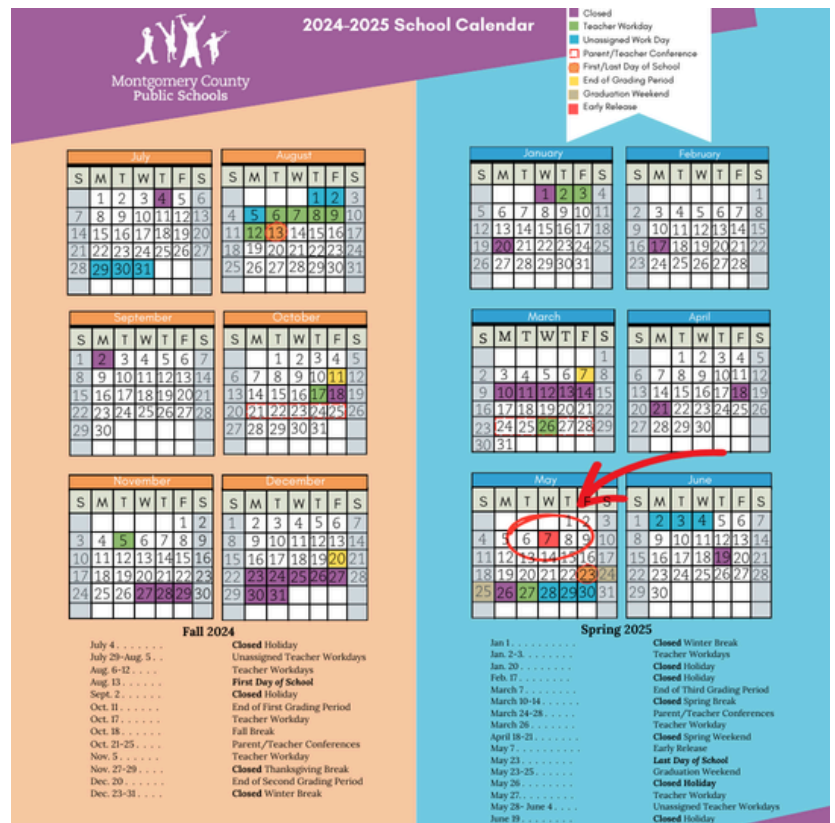


# MCPS School Calendar Change

Heads up! The MCPS School Board has approved May 7, 2025 as an early release day for all schools. Middle and high schools will be dismissed at 12:20 and elementary schools will be dismissed at 1:15 p.m.

A downloadable version of the updated calendar is available on our website!

<https://www.mcps.org/about-us/calendar>



## December Seniors of the Month

Congratulations to our December Seniors of the Month. These students were recognized for their hard work at a recent school board meeting.

Auburn High School – Tanyon Cauley

Blacksburg High School – Abbigail Schnitz

Christiansburg High School - Gracie Conner

Eastern Montgomery High School – Kaylee Williams



#WeAreMCPS

# Bear Force One

Be on the lookout for “Bear Force One” on the streets of Blacksburg. This new transport car is picking up Margaret Beeks Elementary School kids and families who need a ride to school or appointments.

<https://youtu.be/nGpyPyDmtY0>