Frequently Asked Questions: Weather-Related School Closures

How are weather decisions made in Watauga County Schools?

All weather-related decisions are guided by one priority: student and staff safety—especially our ability to transport students safely on school buses.

Watauga County Schools has a seven-member weather team that drives roads across the county to assess conditions firsthand. On mornings when inclement weather is possible, the team begins road checks as early as 3:30 a.m. They document conditions with photographs and written observations, which are shared with the Director of Transportation and district leadership. This information is used to determine whether it is safe to operate buses across all routes in the district.

Why are school delays sometimes called the night before?

Delays may be called in advance when forecasts indicate that conditions are likely to improve with daylight or warmer temperatures. Sunlight can help drivers better see hazards such as black ice, and slightly warmer temperatures may improve road safety.

Calling a delay allows the district additional time to gather the most accurate, up-to-date information before making a final decision. In many cases, this extra time allows conditions to improve enough to safely hold in-person school rather than canceling for the entire day.

Why aren’t weather decisions always made the night before?

While we understand that advance notice helps families plan, most decisions are made in the early morning because forecasts can change overnight. We rely on actual road conditions—not just predictions—when making final determinations.

If there is a reasonable possibility that students can attend school safely, we wait until road conditions can be evaluated firsthand. However, when conditions clearly indicate that in-person learning will not be possible, decisions may be made the night before.

What is the difference between a Remote Learning Day, an Optional Teacher Workday, and a “No Day”?

Remote Learning Day:
Students receive instruction remotely, and the instructional hours count toward the state-required 1,025 instructional hours. This option helps avoid extending the school year.

Optional Teacher Workday:
Students do not attend school, but teachers report to work. These days are built into the employee calendar, with some reserved specifically for potential inclement weather.

“No Day”:
Students and 10-month employees do not report. Instructional time is not lost but is made up later in the school year using one of several state-approved options.

How does the district decide which option to use?

The decision depends on several factors, including road safety, the timing of the weather event, and the number of inclement-weather days already used.

For example:

- The district generally avoids extended sequences of remote learning days, as prolonged remote instruction can be challenging for students and staff.
- If multiple remote learning days have already occurred, an Optional Teacher Workday may be used instead.
- When road conditions are extremely hazardous, a “No Day” may be called to keep students and staff off the roads and allow additional time for road treatment.

How are missed instructional hours made up?

North Carolina law provides several options to make up instructional time, including:

- Extending the school year
- Using designated make-up days or scheduled breaks
- Holding Saturday school following a missed day in the same week
- Adding minutes to the regular instructional day

The district continues to evaluate options that allow us to meet instructional requirements while minimizing disruption to families.

Has the district changed its decision-making process for weather?

No. Watauga County Schools has not changed its weather decision-making protocols. Each year brings different weather patterns, and some winters simply result in more inclement weather than others.

Closure decisions are based on local road conditions and safety assessments. While decisions may vary slightly between districts due to geography and road conditions, neighboring counties often make similar decisions during the same weather events. This reflects shared safety concerns and careful evaluation by experienced teams across the region.