



FCPS

Inclement Weather and Emergency Announcements Guide

HOW DO WE DECIDE? PARENTS' QUESTIONS ANSWERED

The safety of students and staff members is always the primary concern when deciding to close schools or open schools two hours late. Here are answers to the most commonly asked questions.

When are decisions made?

We make every effort to make and announce decisions to close schools or open two hours late by 5:30 a.m. Once a decision is made by the Superintendent, we notify local media and update the school system web page, the school system television channel, and the FCPS hot line.

We know that, by 6 a.m., FCPS students are on buses, at bus stops waiting for buses, or still at home after their parents have left for work. Experience tells school officials that the absolute worst thing the school system can do is to unexpectedly return students home without parents knowing that this is happening. Thus, if FCPS has not decided before 5:30 a.m. to delay opening or to close schools, it is too late to do so without some students being left without parental supervision.

Why aren't announcements made sooner?

If we are lucky, weather events occur in ways and times that make it easy to decide to open, open late, or close. Unfortunately, this is not always the case. Weather conditions may change quickly. This sometimes results in

schools opening when the conditions are worse than anticipated and in schools closing on days when the weather ends up being not all that bad.

Schools are in neighborhoods. Why are we so concerned with roads across the county?

FCPS students and staff members typically travel to school in five ways. Some are driven on school buses, some walk to schools or bus stops, some are driven by their parents, some drive themselves, and some are driven by other students. When the school system considers the impact of weather conditions on the ability to open schools, it considers all these methods of transportation.

In fact, because school bus transportation is by far the safest form of transportation, decisions to delay or close schools are rarely made because of concern over school bus transportation.

FCPS thinks about teenagers who drive to high schools in the early morning hours before it is light and about students who walk and about students waiting at bus stops. The school system considers the many students who attend schools, centers, or programs that are long distances from their homes. FCPS recognizes that thousands of its students go to schools other than their base schools in order to have access to the programs or services that best meet their needs.

Inclement Weather and Emergency Announcement Resources:

www.fcps.edu
Red Apple Cable Channel 21
FCPS hot line • 1-800-839-FCPS
FCPS Keep in Touch (e-mail notification)
Local radio and television stations

Weather-Related Closing Options

Safety first! FCPS will alter school opening and closing schedules when weather conditions threaten the safety of students who walk, ride school buses, or drive to school. The schedules are:

1. Keep schools closed.
2. Open schools two hours late.
3. Close schools two hours early.

1 Schools Closed

The announcement will be made by **5:30 a.m.**

Details about affected activities can be found at www.fcps.edu.

2 2-Hour Late Opening

The announcement will be made by **5:30 a.m.** All school start times and bus pick-up times will be two hours later than normal. SACC will open by 8 a.m. when possible.

Details about affected activities can be found at www.fcps.edu.

3 2-Hour Early Closing

The announcement will be made by **10:30 a.m.**

Details about affected activities can be found at www.fcps.edu.

Parent Responsibilities

Parents should be prepared to make the best decisions for their own children. Parents are urged to make arrangements at the beginning of each school year for the care of their children when schedule changes are made (and to provide for the rare situation when it is necessary to close an individual school because of a power failure or another circumstance). Children should know where to go if a parent will not be home.

Is there a set temperature that would cause you to close schools?

No. We did recently have to open school two hours late because we had a three-day weekend that was unusually cold for this area. Our buses are stored outside, and all have diesel engines. These engines are very cost efficient, but they are hard to start in extreme cold.

We needed to delay the opening of schools to give our staff members—who started their day much earlier than usual—time to travel around the county and get all buses started. While the delay was disruptive to family schedules, it did allow us to get to every bus stop in a timely way and avoid having students out in the cold for excessive periods of time.

Why aren't our buses housed indoors?

Our climate is relatively moderate. It just doesn't make sense to spend the amount of money that would be needed to construct and maintain bus garages for the limited period of time that the garages might be needed each winter.

FCPS Does Not Make Announcements When:

1. Schools are open.
2. Sports and other after-school events will be held according to schedule.
3. Tests are being held according to schedule.

Who makes these decisions?

FCPS administrators participate in regional conference calls that include representatives from the National Weather Service, the Virginia Department of Highways, mass transit, police departments, federal and local agencies, and school systems. The school system consults with the Fairfax County Police Department to get road condition information from different parts of the county. FCPS security staff members report what they are experiencing as they check schools and parking lots. School bus transportation staff members drive into neighborhoods and around schools to obtain firsthand information on current conditions. Administrators talk to FCPS maintenance and custodial staff members who are responsible for clearing and treating school parking lots and sidewalks. Finally, school officials consult with other school systems in the region to share information.

Once all this information is gathered, the Superintendent is called and briefed. He makes the final decision.

Are you all crazy?

Anyone who tries to predict the weather around here has to be at least a little crazy. We appreciate all the collaboration among area agencies that all share our priority for safety. We appreciate the thousands of families across the county that roll with the punches and help us to keep their students on track and learning, even when the weather doesn't cooperate!

Special Note for Kindergarten Families

Schedule changes are a bit more complicated for students in half-day kindergarten programs.

When schools are opened two hours late, if it is on Monday, elementary schools (which usually close early on Mondays) will close at their usual Tuesday-through-Friday time. Morning half-day kindergarten will be dismissed one hour later than the usual Tuesday-through-Friday time. Afternoon half-day kindergarten will begin one hour later than the usual Tuesday-through-Friday time.

When schools are closed two hours early due to worsening weather conditions during the day, elementary schools will close two hours earlier than the usual Tuesday-through-Friday time. Afternoon half-day kindergarten is canceled. Morning half-day kindergarten students will be provided lunch at no cost and will be released with other students. Morning kindergarten students who were bused to school will be bused home with other students. Kindergarten students living within the normal walking boundary will not be bused.