

Maury County Public Schools

Inclement Weather Decision Making Process and FAQ

Maury County Public Schools is aware of the effects of opening school during less than perfect conditions and of closing or delaying schools when poor weather conditions exist. MCPS understands that its students are better served – both academically and socially – by being in school. On the other hand, we operate in more than 600 square miles and the weather can vary significantly--as can road conditions--in different parts of the county. Often major roadways are in good driving condition, but rural roads remain treacherous.

MCPS students and staff members travel to school in many ways. Some are driven on school buses, some walk to schools or bus stops, some are driven by parents, some drive themselves or are driven by other students. When the school district considers the impact of weather conditions on the ability to open schools, all of these methods of transportation are considered. We also consider teenagers who drive to high schools in the early morning hours before it is light. While we do think about bus issues, school bus transportation is by far the safest form of transportation.

MCPS school buses begin their runs shortly after 6:00 a.m. The school district makes every effort to make decisions to delay opening or to not open schools by 5:00 a.m. Occasionally weather conditions worsen quickly thus requiring a later decision. Parents need to be aware of this possibility and plan accordingly. The safety of our students, staff, and parents remains our primary consideration. Once a decision is made, the process of notifying media, updating the web site, sending School Messenger calls to parents, and posting to the district Facebook begins.

If we're lucky, weather events occur in ways and times that make it easy to decide to open, delay, or close. If precipitation is already on the ground and the temperatures are such that the precipitation is frozen or will refreeze, the decision to delay or close is easier. Unfortunately, this is not always the case. Snow, sleet, or freezing rain often doesn't start until between 5:00 a.m. and 8:00 a.m. Flooding can occur on roads in the early morning hours. This sometimes results in schools opening when the conditions are worse than anticipated and sometimes results in schools closing on days when the weather ends up being not too bad. On some days, Maury County residents experience perfect conditions in some areas of the county and very dangerous conditions in other parts.

MCPS prefers to avoid making decisions based on forecasts. When weather events are actually occurring, or have occurred, the school system gathers information from many sources. MCPS administrators confer with local police and sheriffs departments, 911, the Emergency Management Office, representatives from the National Weather Service, and the Tennessee Department of Transportation. MCPS administrators also report what they are experiencing. The Director of Schools along with the Supervisor of Transportation and School Safety may drive across county roads and around schools to obtain firsthand information on current conditions. Once all information is collected, the Director makes the final decision. When everything is said and done, however, each parent should be prepared to make the best decision for his or her own child. If schools are open, but a parent does not believe it is safe for his or her child, the parent should keep the child at home.

Where can I find emergency announcements?

Emergency closing information for Maury County Public Schools is available through these outlets:

- the MCPS home page, www.mauryk12.org
- the district Facebook page, www.facebook.com/maurycopublicschools
- the School Messenger phone call system – ***it is imperative that parents provide current phone numbers for use in this notification system***
- via push notification from the Maury County Public Schools app
- area radio and Nashville television stations

What are the possible choices for weather closings?

MCPS has several options to deal with inclement weather; these are put into effect when conditions threaten the safety of children. These options are: (1) Close schools. (2) Open late. (3) Close early.

How is the decision made to close schools?

Decisions on whether to close our schools are not taken lightly. Every decision takes the safety of all MCPS children into account. We rely on road condition information from TDOT, the Office of Emergency Management, the Maury County Sheriff's Office, and the 911 Director. The Director of Schools confers with the Supervisor of Transportation and School Safety along with the county and state offices mentioned here in making the final decision. Storm tracks can change at any time, significantly affecting the outcome in our area. For this reason, our administrators may wait until early in the morning to see what really does occur instead of making a decision based upon a forecast.

Why aren't schedule change announcements made sooner?

Ideally, a decision may be made the night before a potential delayed opening or closing. If conditions are such that a decision can be made at that time, our goal is to announce school closings and delayed openings by 5 a.m. We try to make a closing or late opening decision as early as possible. The timing of the decision remains secondary, however, to safety issues.

Do you understand how inconvenient it is to arrange childcare at the last minute?

Yes, we do! Parents are urged to make arrangements now 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 other circumstances). Children should know where to go if a parent will not be home.

Why doesn't MCPS close only those portions of the county that are most affected by the weather?

There are many reasons why closing portions of the school district is not feasible. Among them:

- Students in various programs are transported all over the county on any given day. If a portion of the school district were to close while other portions remained open, we would have students who live in the "closed" area who need to get to schools that are open and vice versa.
- Buses are used numerous times every day for runs all over the county. A bus housed in a "closed" portion of the system would still be needed to serve open schools.
- Many teachers and specialists work in numerous buildings across the county.
- Properly and clearly communicating what is open and what is closed to a large community of parents, students, and staff members is a challenging task.

There are weather occurrences that may cause a closing of one school such as flooding or tornado activity that has damaged a school building. These instances will be handled as they arise.

What happens when the number of school days lost due to inclement weather exceeds the number of days (7) planned in the school year calendar?

There are seven inclement weather days built into the school calendar. The Director of Schools and Central Office Administrators are responsible for developing and implementing a plan to make up for additional days missed. Teachers work hard to ensure continuity of learning for students when school days are missed due to inclement weather.

How do I find out if a particular event is canceled or postponed due to inclement weather?

If schools are closed and there are after-hours events scheduled for that day, those events and activities are canceled. If schools are closed subsequent days, each school has the option to continue with events and activities that are scheduled for after-hours. Contact your school principal to find out what will happen at your child's school for days following 'day 1' of school closing. Extended care notices will be communicated from individual schools.

Can I choose to keep my child home even if schools are open? Will this be an excused absence?

Parents may decide to keep their child home. Parents should contact their child's schools to determine if the absence will be excused.

In the case of a delayed opening, is the school day extended?

No. Schools dismiss at their normal times, even if they opened with a delay.

Can I come and pick up my child when there is a TORNADO WARNING issued for our area?

No. A tornado warning is the most severe warning and if a warning of this level has been issued when students and school personnel are on campuses, no buses will run nor students released until the warning is lifted. Students and all personnel within the school building will remain inside the school in designated tornado areas until the warning has expired. Release of students during a tornado puts everyone in danger.

Is there an announcement when there ISN'T a delay or closing due to inclement weather?

No announcement is made when schools are operating on a normal schedule.

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