



WEATHER-RELATED DECISIONS: HOW IS THE CALL MADE?

When inclement weather occurs, Anne Arundel County Public Schools has personnel out assessing the roads as soon as that is practical. Decisions about delayed openings or closings are made with many factors in mind, most notably the condition of school lots and walkways, the condition of roads, and the condition of sidewalks students must travel to get to school.

Here is how a typical weather-related decision unfolds:

Day or days before: AACPS officials monitor weather conditions as systems approach the area, and begin to discuss the possibilities of the impact on our county and school system. Trucks and other equipment are loaded with fuel, sand, etc., in preparation for any weather event.

3 to 4:30 a.m. the morning of an event: School system Transportation Division crews are traveling roads throughout the county, assessing those conditions as well as conditions of school lots and driveways. Crews have temperature guns to record and report pavement temperatures, a critical factor in snow and ice accumulation.

By 4 a.m.: School system crews are beginning to treat school lots with sand and salt as necessary. Conversations with county and state agencies also are taking place to gather more information. To be clear, those agencies do not provide recommendations and are not charged with playing any part in what is our final decision.

By 5:00 a.m.: Information about road and school lot conditions, along with an assessment of the forecast, is used to form a recommendation that is made to the Superintendent or, in the absence of the Superintendent, a designee. This is imperative so that, when conditions warrant, we can prevent buses from leaving bus lots.

5:00 to 5:10 a.m.: Media outlet notifications begin; website/Facebook/Twitter postings of any delay or closure take place; and email/text message notifications to parents and staff are done.

5 a.m.: First buses leave lots throughout the county. Remaining buses leave lots and are on the road by 5:30 a.m.

5:30 a.m.: Automated telephone message to parents and employees begins. Reaching entire phone database takes approximately 30 to 45 minutes.

5:30 a.m.: First students board buses. These students are typically headed to magnet or countywide programs (such as the Phoenix Academy), or to nonpublic institutions that are often outside the county.

6:50 a.m.: The last of our “first run” students, including 22,500 high school students, are on buses and headed to schools.

The timing of a decision and notification is crucial, because parents and students must be notified before the first child leaves a home to catch a bus. Altering transportation schedules once students begin to board buses is not possible because it could leave AACPS in a position where we may be unable to communicate those changes to students and their parents/guardians, potentially leaving some of them outside in harsh conditions.

Further, the complexity of bus routes and the fact that there is no standard “break” between sets of bus runs makes altering the process once buses are picking up children nearly impossible.

Absences due to hazardous conditions

Anne Arundel County Public Schools cannot inspect every driveway, road, or walkway in the county. Parents and guardians, using our decisions as a guide, must be the final decision-makers for their children regarding school attendance. Administrative regulation JB-RA addresses this issue explicitly in section C(5)(d): “Hazardous weather conditions which would endanger the health or safety of the student when in transit to and from school will be considered lawful (absences).”

NOTIFICATIONS OF SCHOOL CLOSINGS, DELAYED OPENINGS

Parents and school system employees receive email, text, and voice notification of closings and delayed openings through the Blackboard Connect (formerly Connect-ED) automated notification system. In addition, notices are posted on the school system’s website (www.aacps.org), Facebook page (www.facebook.com/aacps), and Twitter page (@AACountySchools); individual school Twitter pages; and broadcast on major area radio and television stations, including AACPS-TV (Channel 96/996 (HD) on Comcast, 96/496 (HD) on Broadstripe, and Channel 36 on Verizon). In addition, announcements are posted (and you may sign up for e-mail alerts) on the School’s Out website (www.schoolsout.com).

With regard to school closings and delayed openings, what time are notifications made?

Notifications are sent as soon as possible after a decision is made on a school closing or delayed opening. With regard to winter weather, sometimes the timing of a storm makes a decision the night before feasible. Most often, however, that is not the case and notifications are sent early in the morning.

Email and text message notifications to parents and staff, as well as postings to the AACPS Facebook and AACPS and individual school Twitter pages, are typically sent close to 5:00 a.m. Media notifications also occur at this time.

Telephone calls are typically scheduled to begin at 5:30 a.m. They are sent in a single call so that parents with more than one child receive only one phone call.

The earliest and most reliable places to find information on school closings and delayed openings are email/text messages, AACPS’ social media sites, and the AACPS website (www.aacps.org).

How do I ensure that my phone number and email are used by the notification system?

Phone numbers and email addresses used by the Blackboard Connect (formerly Connect-ED) system are pulled from the district’s student information system. Those numbers are used for notification purposes only if they are listed in the database. Parents should make sure the information on file for their child is correct and up-to-date.

For general messages, Blackboard Connect can contact up to two phone numbers and six email addresses. It can also send text messages to any of the six phones listed on a student’s account that are mobile phones. If your phone is a mobile phone, however, you will need to let your child’s school know that so that it can be designated to receive text messages. If you have questions about what information is contained in your child’s Blackboard Connect account, please contact your child’s school.

I am receiving notifications and do not have any children in the system. How do I remove my information?

Call the Communications Office at 410-222-5316 and we will be happy to assist.

Once my mobile phone is on file with my child’s school, will I automatically receive text messages?

Your number must first be designated in your child’s account as being able to receive text messages. Your child’s school can make this designation for you. You will receive a confirmation notification and you must reply in order to begin receiving text messages. Messages will come from either 23177 or 63079. You may wish to save these numbers in your contact list and designate them as AACPS.

My mobile phone number is on file with my child's school but I am not receiving text messages. What can I do to begin receiving them?

Call your child's school to have them designate the phone number as able to receive text messages. If you do not receive a confirmation message within 12 hours, text SUBSCRIBE AACPS to 23177 or 63079.

Remember, numbers must be on file in your child's account in order for you to begin receiving messages. Subscriptions to numbers that are not on file are not valid and will not receive text messages.

I am getting text messages and I see your Facebook and Twitter postings. I would like to stop receiving telephone calls. How can I do this?

Blackboard Connect is developing a new component of its system that will allow parents to fully designate the method in which they wish to receive notifications.

Where can I get more information about closings and delays?

Information can be found at www.aacps.org/closings.