

Macon County Schools Winter Reminders

Winter is fast approaching our area. Cold, wind and snow will be here before we know it. With this in mind, Macon County Schools would like to remind and inform the public of how the school system makes decisions and how those decisions are communicated to the public when inclement weather strikes the Franklin area.

The first thing that the school system asks of parents is to make sure that the correct contact information is on file at their child's school. If there are any questions or changes in contact information, please notify your child's school. The district will make all communication on closings and delays through that information which is on file at each school.

Macon County Schools understands that when school is open, children are learning. Therefore, we want to keep the doors to each school open as much as possible. However, the safety of our children and their families is our top priority. We understand that weather can disrupt our plans for instruction.

Macon County Schools realizes that closing school or changing the daily school schedule can have an impact on families and their work schedules. We want parents to understand how we make and announce our decisions regarding inclement weather.

When winter weather strikes overnight, the process for evaluating the safety of roads, and thus the ability to open schools, begins at 4:00 am. Macon County School officials communicate with a variety of agencies such as NCDOT, Macon County Law Enforcement, Macon County Dispatch, and the National Weather Service. Weather forecasts, and radar projections, are also checked.

Shortly after 4:00 am, Macon County School officials begin physically checking roads that might present a danger to buses, student driver's, faculty and staff as well as student families. Several regions of the Franklin area are traveled by school officials throughout the inclement weather period. One part of the county may receive more inclement weather than another part of the county. It is important that the impact that the weather has on those roads be reported to the Superintendent as soon as possible.

The final decision to close school, delay an opening or dismiss early is made by the Superintendent with the assistance of the Weather Service, road condition reports, dispatch reports, and NCDOT reports.

Our bus drivers must be on the road very early in the mornings. Therefore, once the decision has been made to alter the regular school schedule bus drivers are notified first. Next, a phone message is created and sent out to each student's household in the school system. Faculty and staff also receive this phone call. The notice is then sent to radio stations, TV stations, and posted on the school system website, Facebook page, and school web pages.

Our buses and school aged drivers travel roads that vary in elevation by as much as 3,000 feet. There are occasions in which only certain regions in the Franklin area are impacted by inclement weather. When this happens and we can run most of the bus routes in the Franklin area, limited bus service may be offered for students. Limited service roads are listed on the Macon County Schools website, and also on each particular schools' websites. If you have questions about those roads listed, you may call your child's school or call the Macon County Schools Central Office at 524-3314 and speak with Auxiliary Services Director Todd Gibbs. Students who are unable to attend school due to the lack of bus service, or simply because the parent believes that travel is unsafe, will have their absence excused.

Nantahala and Highlands make their own determination on their schools' schedule based on road conditions in those specific parts of the county. All decisions affecting all schools in the county are made or advised by the Superintendent.

On very rare occasions, schools may be delayed or closed due to extremely bitter cold even though roads are clear. Very low temperatures, especially when combined with wind, can pose a threat to young children. These conditions also make it difficult to start and operate the diesel fueled school buses that carry about 40 percent of students to school each day. The possibility that a small child could be left in the bitter cold waiting for a bus that is mechanically delayed is unacceptable.

Please know that the Macon County School System will make the best decisions possible by considering the information currently available. The safety of our students, their families, and our employees is our highest priority in making this call. We ask for everyone's patience and understanding as we face the challenges of winter weather in the months ahead.

When school days are missed due to inclement weather, Macon County Schools will make every effort to make those days up later in the semester or the school year.

Holding classes on Saturdays is an option to make up for a closed school day but only when there has been a day missed during the current week. Saturdays are not the preferable option to make up missed school days but they are an option. Converting teacher workdays into student instruction days are the least invasive days to use for make-up snow days.

Spring break days are another option to make-up missed instructional days due to inclement weather. Again, this is not the *preferred* choice to make up missed snow days, but it is an option. Families making plans for Spring Break should be aware that those Spring Break days, in *extreme conditions*, may be converted into student instructional school days to make up for missed student days because of poor weather during the winter.

Fortunately last school year, Franklin area schools were only closed for two school days for inclement weather. During the 15/16 school year, Franklin area schools were closed five days for inclement weather. Seven school days were missed during the 14/15 school year. Obviously, weather is very unpredictable. How the snow and ice affects the Franklin area schools and our calendar is also very unpredictable.

Once again, please have patience with the inclement weather process. Realize that weather cancelations are made with the safety of all involved.

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