**APS Winter Weather Procedures – Frequently Asked Questions**

**Who makes these decisions? How do you decide?**
Decisions regarding school operations are based on information provided by the National Weather Service, in consultation with the Virginia Department of Public Works and the Arlington County Department of Environmental Services, as well as federal and local public safety and transportation officials. APS staff also consult with neighboring school systems and consider the operating status of federal and local government offices.

In addition, APS transportation staff members drive normal bus routes in the early morning hours to check roads in neighborhoods and around schools to obtain firsthand information on current conditions of the roads, bus stops, sidewalks and parking lots. The safety of our students, staff and visitors is at the forefront of every decision. Once this information is gathered, staff brief the Superintendent, who makes the final decision in consultation with the APS Executive Leadership Team based on the information available at the time.

**When are the decisions announced?**
Depending on the forecast, APS makes every effort to make decisions regarding operating status in the evening by 6 p.m., understanding that parents need time to plan. However, if the forecast is uncertain and still developing, APS waits to get the latest forecast and assess actual road conditions in the morning. Morning decisions to close schools or have a delayed opening are announced by 5:00 a.m.

Decisions about early dismissal are normally announced by 11:30 a.m. Once a decision is made, staff notifies local media and updates all APS communications channels. Email and text messages are also sent to APS School Talk subscribers.

**Why aren’t announcements made sooner?**
We try to announce in the evening when possible; however, because weather conditions can change quickly, we often wait until the early morning to assess road conditions and verify that conditions predicted are accurate. This allows us every opportunity to keep schools open (if possible) and operate on a normal schedule.

**What if the snow hasn’t started by the time you decide?**
If the forecast on the day before a snow event indicates that snow may start during morning arrivals or at the beginning of the school day, we will make every effort to announce a delayed opening by 6 p.m. the evening before. This allows families to plan and allows APS to assess how the forecast evolves over the next 12 hours. Staff then reassess weather forecasts and road conditions in the morning and will send an update by 5 a.m. if conditions require schools to close for the day.

**How are the Extended Day Program, field trips and after-school activities affected by closings and delays?**
When schools are closed, all buildings are closed, and all school activities are cancelled unless otherwise announced. Central offices may remain open on a revised schedule. Extended Day and Check-In are also closed. All school activities are canceled unless otherwise announced.

When a school opening is delayed, all early field trips are cancelled and the Extended Day before school program also opens late by the same number of hours. Breakfast is served. Field trips scheduled for later in the day may still proceed, unless decided otherwise. Additionally, APS Food Services staff must report to work at their regular time in the event of a delay.

If schools have a delayed opening on a day originally scheduled to be an “early release” day, the early release will be cancelled and schools will end at their regular time.
What happens when there is an early dismissal?
Early dismissal decisions are usually announced by 11:30 a.m. Lunch will be served for students prior to dismissal. All afternoon and evening activities, including Adult Education, are usually cancelled. The Extended Day after school program begins at the early dismissal time but closes at 4:00 p.m., so families should plan to pick up their students by 4:00 p.m.

What is the impact on the bus schedule when there is a delayed opening or early dismissal?
When schools have a delayed opening, bus service also runs on a delayed schedule. For instance, if there is a two-hour delay, a bus normally scheduled to pick up at 8:15 a.m. will pick up at 10:15 a.m. Similarly, for early dismissals, the bus will shift to an earlier timeframe. We also remind families that buses may experience delays due to the traffic congestion that normally occurs during inclement weather.

How do you communicate about bus delays during inclement weather?
APS communicates about significant delays as soon as we hear about them. Messages are shared through all channels, including APS School Talk and social media.

Why doesn’t APS close schools in only those portions of the County that are most affected?
While many of our students attend schools close to home, many others are transported by bus across the County to schools outside of their neighborhood. Therefore, we factor in conditions across the County, not just one section or neighborhood.

Will APS notify families if schools are open and there is NO delay or closing?
No announcement is made when schools are operating on a normal schedule.

How do I find out if APS schools are open?
In the event of a delay, closing, and/or early dismissal of a school or schools, news about these decisions is communicated as soon as the decision is made. Methods of communication include:
- APS website at www.apsva.us and the Emergency page at www.apsva.us/emergency-alerts
- Emails, voicemails and/or text messages sent via the APS School Talk messaging system
- Hotline, 703-228-4277, message in English and Spanish
- Local radio stations and TV Channels 4, 5, 7, 8, 9 and Univision and Telemundo
- Message posted on Twitter, Facebook and Instagram

We encourage families to make sure your school has your up-to-date email in their database, as well as your cell phone number, designated as a cell phone. Then you can just text YES to 67587 to receive APS School Talk texts.

Do you understand how difficult it is to arrange childcare at the last minute?
Yes, we do! We urge all families to make alternative plans now for the care of their students when school schedules change. Families can explore options with their neighbors and PTA members, form community childcare teams to support each other, or identify qualified teen babysitters in your neighborhood.

What if I decide it’s not safe to go out and want to keep my student at home?
We respect our parents’ decisions to make choices to keep their children safe. In those cases, we just ask families to please follow the normal procedures to inform schools about your children’s absence.

Our 2019-20 APS Student Handbook (pp 23-24) offers additional information. Please contact your child’s school if you have additional questions.