

SUPERINTENDENT UPDATE – Emergency Weather Closing Procedures

Fall 2018

Dear Parents/Guardians,

As the winter season approaches, please be assured that we are very sensitive to how much impact the decision to open or close schools in bad weather can have on families. While we know that students are better served, both academically and socially by being in school, our top priority is always the safety of our students.

In order to shed some light on this important topic, I would like to revisit some questions we typically get as the weather begins to change this time of year.

QUESTION: *How do we make our decision?* As Superintendent, I make the decision to open or close the schools in bad weather after conferring with key district personnel, local officials and superintendents of neighboring districts. We carefully analyze all relevant factors, such as:

- **Information on road conditions from key district and police personnel.** We must give careful consideration to the most dangerous roads in the district. Even if your street looks clear, travel elsewhere in the district may be dangerous. Also, we must consider the conditions under which our staff members who live out of town drive to work.
- **Amount of snow and ice accumulated.**
- **Whether precipitation is continuing.**
- **Building conditions** (such as whether we have electricity and heat).
- **Parking lot conditions.** Our custodians and maintenance personnel work hard to clear and treat not only parking lots but also sidewalks and building entrances. Sometimes, under certain weather conditions, we can't get this done in time for the opening of school.
- **Temperature and wind chill.** Extreme cold can render our salting and de-icing efforts relatively ineffective.
- **Weather predictions.** We prefer to not make our decision based on weather predictions, as we all know they are not always accurate. However, sometimes this is unavoidable.
- **What other school districts are doing.** We also share information with other local districts and check whether they are opening or closing.

QUESTION: *When is the decision made?* We try to gather enough information to make the decision no later than 5:15am, so we can communicate that decision (see below) in time to avoid parents leaving for work without having made childcare arrangements (and to avoid staff members, particularly those at the early starting schools, leaving for work only to turn around once/if they get here). This early decision point MAY result in an initial decision of a delay, followed by a subsequent decision to cancel an hour or so later, if weather or other factors worsen. We will try not to add this element of change to the morning chaos, but I want you to be aware that it is a possibility as we continue to strive to make the best decision possible.

QUESTION: *How is the public notified?* As soon as the decision is made, we will activate the district's automated phone/email/text alert system called "School Messenger." This is our primary means of communication in times of emergency, so please be sure the data we have on file for your family are up to date. For each family, multiple phone numbers and/or email addresses can be accessed automatically with a message about the status of school for that day. We will also notify

TV stations (News12, WABC, WCBS and WNBC), local online news outlets (*The Item* and *TAPintoMillburn-Short Hills*) and radio station 101.5. You can also check our website (www.millburn.org) or call our main switchboard (973/376-3600).

QUESTION: Will the Township also notify us about closings?

Please be sure you have signed up for Millburn Township's **Swift911** alert system. Go to www.twp.millburn.nj.us and click on the link on the left side of the page, or text Swift911 to 99538 for instructions. You can choose to receive phone calls, emails and text messages.

My staff and I will do our absolute best to prevent the unknown in this process, we know that there are times when no perfect decision exists. If you do not feel as though it is safe for your child to attend school, by all means use your best judgment as to whether or not he or she should attend. I hope the above has at least helped explain the process we follow. No matter what, please know that the district staff will continue to work as hard as we can to make the best possible decision for all in the Millburn school community.

Christine Burton

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