



# Wissahickon School District

## *Bleeding Blue with a Heart of Gold*

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November 1, 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 as always the safety of our students. In order to shed some light on this important topic, I would like to revisit a set of questions we typically get at this time of year.

**QUESTION: How do we make our decision?** Please understand that we make the decision to open or close the schools in bad weather after carefully analyzing 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.
- ✓ 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: Who makes the decision?** As Superintendent of Schools, I am responsible for the final decision, based on the above factors and recommendations from key district personnel and local officials. Also, I confer with the superintendents of neighboring districts before making any decision.

**QUESTION: When is the decision made?** We try to gather enough information to make the decision no later than 5:30 a.m., 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 notification system ("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 in the Sapphire Community Portal (see below). For each family, multiple phone numbers can be accessed automatically with voice and text messages about the status of school for that day. You can also check our website ([www.wsdweb.org](http://www.wsdweb.org)) or the district's social media outlets (*Facebook* and *Twitter*). Additionally, an announcement is posted on the Wissahickon TV station (Comcast channel 28 or Verizon channel 41) and information is submitted to commercial TV stations 3, 6, 10 and 29 and KYW Newsradio 1060 (school closing #314). Also, if you have downloaded our new mobile phone app and allowed push notifications, you will also receive an alert on your phone.

**QUESTION: Will we close schools early if conditions worsen?** As we know all too well, we cannot easily reverse our decision in the morning without creating significant disruption in the community. Once we make the decision to open the schools, many parents rely on it and leave for work. In many cases, it is not the least bit easy to make the necessary last minute arrangements to care for students sent home early. However, if conditions do get sufficiently worse during the school day to the point where we need to have an early dismissal in order to ensure everyone's safety, we will make that decision and we will then give as much notice as possible. The public and all district families will be notified in the normal ways (see above). **NOTE: It is extremely important to update all contact information, including any mid-year changes, per the instructions for the district's "Sapphire Community Portal" data collection system that were sent to all families at the beginning of school. If you did not receive those instructions, please visit the "For Parents" tab on our website's homepage and click on the "Sapphire Community Portal" link.**

Although my staff and I do our absolute best 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 Wissahickon school community.

Sincerely,

*James A. Crisfield*

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