



HEMPFIELD AREA SCHOOL DISTRICT
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Dr. Mark A. Gross
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Committed to Educational Excellence

December 19, 2016

Dear Parents, Guardians and Staff:

I am writing to share with you information on how decisions regarding school closings and delays are made in the Hempfield Area School District. We have already experienced our first taste of snow and cold weather and I have received some questions asking how decisions are made. This letter serves to provide you with some background information.

The safety of our students needs to be paramount when making these decisions. Each decision is made on an individual basis and many factors are examined. When we experience inclement weather, the final decision to delay or cancel school is made by the superintendent, but it is not made in isolation. Communication occurs with the following departments and entities:

- The Hempfield Area Transportation Department on the condition of the bus fleet
- Hempfield Township Public Works to determine road conditions and the progress they have made clearing the roads
- Hempfield Area Facilities & Custodial Managers to determine the condition of the parking lots and sidewalks and estimated amount of time needed to clear areas
- National Weather Service for storm tracking information
- Consultation with other Westmoreland County superintendents

Living in Western Pennsylvania, inclement weather is the norm in the winter. Numerous discussions have been held among the administrators and teachers about the increase in two hour delays in recent years. The delays not only cause a disruption to the educational process, but they create a hardship for working parents who need to make child care arrangements or arrive late for work.

School delays for cold are tricky, because if the air temperature is not going to increase substantially within two hours, and the road conditions are not a factor, there is very little to be gained by having a two hour delay. Last Thursday, the temperature actually dropped considerably as the day progressed. With the cold weather we experienced last week, Hempfield Area, in addition to Greater Latrobe, Ligonier, Derry, Greensburg Salem, Norwin, Jeannette, Penn Trafford, and Franklin Regional made the decision not to delay the start of school, since the temperature did not appreciably increase within a two hour time frame and actually became colder.

Parents are encouraged to be cognizant of what your children are wearing when they leave for school on very cold days to ensure that they are adequately protected against the elements.

The diesel fuel that powers our busses has an additive that prevents it from freezing. In addition, our newer busses contain an auxiliary heater that automatically heats the bus an hour before departure. There are also block heaters on the motors that warm the antifreeze to a higher temperature, thus making the buses easier to start. On cold mornings, the busses are started at 4:30 AM to determine if they are operational.

The final decision on whether or not to send your child to school on an inclement weather day rests with you, the parent. If you are not comfortable by the decision made by the school district, then please submit an excuse that indicates that your child did not attend school due to the extremely cold weather, or unsafe road conditions. We will honor this as an excused absence.

Sincerely,

Barbara J. Marin, Ed. D.
Superintendent of Schools

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