

How FCPS Decides to Cancel or Delay School During Bad Weather

Closing or delaying schools is a serious responsibility. A change in a school schedule can create inconveniences and difficulties for many families. That's why we promise our community that FCPS will make the best and most informed decisions we can and that we'll communicate decisions as quickly and reliably as we can.

We evaluate many factors and sources of information as we work to make the most responsible decisions for our students and employees. Our main focus is always their safety. We also think about how a potential delay or closing might impact instructional time for our students.

With those things in mind, here's the process we follow to decide on a delay or closing:

Our Transportation and School Security Departments get regular updates from several sources (including county Emergency Management and state officials) to stay ahead of developing weather. We monitor weather by radar in real time. We also talk to neighboring school districts about the conditions they're seeing. On mornings when we have bad weather, FCPS Transportation employees fan out throughout the county before 4 AM to assess roads and sidewalks. At the same time, we contact county and state highway departments to hear their plans to clear roads. Senior FCPS administrators evaluate all this information. The Superintendent decides--by 5 AM--if and when we can safely open schools and transport students.

Our Communications Department then shares the Superintendent's decision. Through FindOutFirst, we email, text, tweet and update our Facebook page, and we post information on fcps.org and FCPS TV Comcast Channel 18. We also make individual phone calls to more than two dozen regional media outlets. All of this is typically done within 30 minutes.

We think these are the most reasonable, practical and timely steps to make and communicate closing and delay decisions. That doesn't mean our decisions, in retrospect, are always perfect--weather and road conditions can change quickly. It does mean, though, that we always think through these decisions carefully and that student safety is our number one concern in making the best decisions with the information available at the time.

If you have suggestions on how FCPS might improve the way we make closing and delay decisions, please send us an email: Suggestions@fcps.org. We'll write back to you. For more information, you can read our school closing regulation (Reg. 400-2) online at <https://apps.fcps.org/legal/doc.php?number=400-02> and visit <http://www.fcps.org/weather>.