



Weather Safety – School Cancellations, Delays, and Early Dismissals

Pre-Decision Process

When the threat of inclement weather exists, the Huntsville City Schools Weather Safety Team (WST) begins the process of making critical decisions for determining school activities and employee work schedules. The lead facilitator of the WST is the Director of Operations. Other permanent WST members are the Deputy Superintendents, the Transportation Coordinator, the Director of Community Engagement, the Director of Communications, and the Safety/Risk Manager. Other HCS personnel may be added to the WST as required. To the extent possible, HCS will coordinate weather decisions with other local school districts.

Between 72 and 24 hours before a severe weather event, the Huntsville-Madison County Emergency Management Agency (EMA) officials will typically call a meeting or convene a conference call in order to share the latest information from the National Weather Service (NWS). HCS representation at the EMA meeting or call will include, at a minimum, one of the following three key personnel: The Operations Director, the Transportation Coordinator, or the Safety/Risk Manager. Preferably, all three will attend, in addition to either the Director of Communications or the Director of Community Engagement.

Decision Process

At the EMA meeting, the HCS team will confer with city officials and representatives from Madison County and Madison City schools. After the EMA meeting, the HCS Operations Director and/or others who have attended the meeting will call the Superintendent and recommend a course of action based on the data received and discussion held at the meeting. Once the Superintendent has approved a course of action, the Director of Communications and the Director of Community Engagement will disseminate the information on all District communications platforms (web site, school cast, social media) and to local media outlets, with the caveat that the Superintendent and District Staff will evaluate the situation again the day of the expected weather event and issue an updated decision based on any new information obtained between the last EMA meeting and the day of the expected weather event.

On the day the weather event is occurring, if the Superintendent has decided the day before to begin school at the regularly scheduled time, the Weather Safety Team will convene a full WST meeting via

conference call or in person between 4:30am and 5:00am, which the Operations Director's office will coordinate (sending an outlook invitation with location of meeting and/or conference call information). HCS leaders will consider hazardous travel and hazardous exposure impacts of the weather. Once the Superintendent either affirms the course of action agreed upon after the last EMA meeting or directs a new course of action based on new information, the WST will coordinate with the Director of Communications and the Director of Community Engagement for dissemination of the information on all District communications platforms (web site, school cast, social media) and to local media outlets no later than 6:00am.

School Cancellations/Delays Due to Hazardous Weather Conditions

If conditions are deemed hazardous for travel, HCS will close or delay opening in order to allow weather conditions to improve or be remediated. Buses will run on a delayed schedule to allow time for inclement weather conditions to improve. The official school day for students will begin in accordance with the delayed bus schedule. In a delayed opening situation, school staff and faculty will report to work 15 minutes before the delayed school start time. District Staff and support personnel will also report to work 15 minutes before the delayed school start time unless specific exceptions have been authorized by the Superintendent. Safety is the number one priority for students, staff, and faculty. Principals may work on a case-by-case basis with employees who have children to determine appropriate arrangements that do not create undue hardship at the school. School meals may be delayed or cancelled, depending on the circumstances.

Early Dismissals

If inclement weather becomes imminent during the regularly scheduled school day and/or normal operations hours, the WST will review all available information from the EMA and the NWS on the impending weather event along with the history of the last 12 hours of weather conditions. After the EMA meeting, the HCS Operations Director and/or others who have attended the meeting will call the Superintendent and recommend a course of action based on the data received and discussion held at the meeting. If the Superintendent desires a full WST meeting via conference call or in person, the Operations Director or other District representative at the meeting will coordinate that forum. Considerations for early dismissal include but are not limited to: bus route completion times, bus mobilization timespan, dangerous road conditions, severity of threat, field trips, special events, after-school extracurricular activities, and community events scheduled for the day. If the decision for an early dismissal is made, the dismissal order will be in three tiers as follows: all elementary (P5 and P6) schools and all P8 schools (including AAA and ASFL) will dismiss first, followed 30 minutes later by all middle schools and junior high schools, followed 30 minutes later by all high schools.

Extracurricular Activities

If schools are dismissed early or cancelled for inclement weather, all HCS after-school activities (including extended day programs) and events will be cancelled.

Method of Notification

Once a decision for cancellation, delay, or early dismissal is made, it will be communicated widely to the public and school employees through all available communication methods. This may include, but is not limited to the following: SchoolCast, media release, email, social media, and Nixle (EMA notification system). HCS Staff who are responsible for managing contract personnel will contact the contractor's office as soon as they are notified of the decision regarding the school day (for example, the Transportation Coordinator will contact the contracted bus company).

Post-Early Dismissal Actions

Principals and designated staff will remain on campuses until the last student and non-essential staff, leaves the building. Principals will submit a closure report to their Director of Instruction via email or phone, confirming that the campus is clear of students. Directors of Instruction will, in turn, notify the Deputy Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction once all schools within their area of responsibility have submitted their closure reports. Campus Security personnel will remain on campuses until all students and staff have departed and submit closure reports to the Security Control Room. The Security Control Room will report to the Security Coordinator and the Operations Director when campuses are completely empty.

Decision Tree

