

# VERNON PUBLIC SCHOOLS



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Dear Vernon Families:

The winter season is almost upon us. The district administration understands that our decision to open or close schools due to inclement weather has an impact on families. We also understand that our students are better served – both academically and socially – by being in school. However, as always, our top priority is the safety and well-being of our students.

## • HOW DO WE MAKE OUR DECISION?

Please understand that the decision to open or close schools during inclement or hazardous weather is based on a careful analysis of all relevant factors, such as:

- **Information on road conditions from the Vernon Department of Public Works, Police Department, and our School Bus Transportation Company.** We give careful consideration to the most dangerous roads in the district. The Town of Vernon has many winding and hilly streets. Even if your street looks clear, travel elsewhere in the district may be dangerous, especially in the higher elevation areas of Vernon. Also, we consider that many high school students drive themselves to school.
- **Weather Forecast and Predictions.** We prefer to not make our decision based solely on weather predictions, which are not always 100% accurate, but sometimes this is unavoidable. The amount of snow and ice accumulated and forecasted is a major factor in the decision to close school. Temperature and wind chill factors are also important as students wait outside for the bus or walk to school.
- **Building Conditions.** Our schools need to be a safe, healthy, and secure environment for all students, staff, and visitors, especially during COVID-19. Issues such as whether we have electricity and heat are critical factors to consider. Parking lot conditions and entry ways need to be safe and passable for all students, staff, and visitors.
- **What other school districts are doing.** We share information with ten other local school districts via a conference call and check whether they are opening or closing.

## • WHO MAKES THE DECISION?

As the Superintendent of Schools, I am responsible for the final decision, based on the above factors and recommendations from the Public Works Department, Police Department, School Bus Company, Town/District Facilities Department and our Consulting Meteorologist.

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- **HOW IS THE PUBLIC NOTIFIED?**

The following media outlets are notified: TV Stations (WFSB Channel 3, WTNH Channel 8, WVIT Channel 30, FOX Channel 61) and Radio Station (WTIC 1080AM). Parents can sign up for a text message for school closings by logging on to WFSB Channel 3 and selecting to receive mobile text alerts for the Vernon Public Schools. In addition, as you know, we send out a Backboard Connect Alert via voice message, e-mail message, and cell phone text informing parents that school is canceled or delayed. Parents and Guardians should ensure that their current emergency contact information has been given to the schools. Please do not call the school unless it is an emergency.

- **WHEN IS THE DECISION MADE?**

A decision needs to be made by 5:30AM as bus routes begin at about 5:45AM and media stations need to be notified to broadcast a school closing alert before students and families leave home to travel to school.

- **WILL WE CLOSE SCHOOL IF CONDITIONS WORSEN?**

Keep in mind that even if weather conditions worsen, we cannot reverse our decision in the morning without endangering students. Once we make the decision to open the schools, many parents rely on it and leave for work. If conditions worsen during the school day, we may need to have an early dismissal, but we will give adequate notice to all parents first. Although my staff and I do our absolute best in this process, weather conditions can be unpredictable. If you do not feel as though it is safe for your child to attend school, use your best judgment on whether they should attend. Also, please discourage teenagers from driving in bad conditions and offer them alternatives if weather conditions worsen.

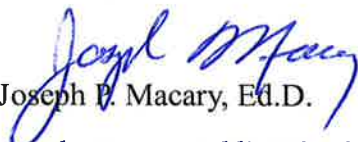
- **IS THERE AN ALTERNATE TO NO SCHOOL FOR A SNOW DAY CANCELLATION?**

Yes. Based on the Connecticut State Board for Education meeting on October 7, 2020, the Superintendent of Schools may choose to treat "snow days" as a Remote Learning Day (RLD) or in Vernon a Virtual Learning Day. The Vernon Public Schools may use this option of a Remote (Virtual) Learning Day instead of a snow day cancellation that would be added as a make-up day in June for the 2020-2021 school year. School days during the year from December to March are more valuable instructional time for teaching and learning than those in June.

Our plan is to use this RLD as an official school day as much as possible, unless there are other factors, like no electrical power in Vernon that would not allow us to use computers or the internet at student's homes. Maximizing student learning for all children is our primary goal. School Administration and Vernon Teachers will use our digital technology platforms to assign academic work during RLD for all students. Students and families should be prepared to access the remote (virtual) learning option with short notice, due to New England weather.

We hope that this explanation helps everyone understand the process that our district utilizes to make the best possible decision for all students and staff in our district. Thank you for your time and consideration. Let's hope for good weather this season.

Sincerely,

  
Joseph P. Macary, Ed.D.

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