

# Northwest Allen County Schools Guidelines for School Delays and Closings Due to Inclement Weather

## Beliefs

- Weather conditions are both variable and potentially extreme in Northeast Indiana; the safety of children will guide decisions regarding delaying or closing.
- Concrete rules do not exist in making decisions regarding variable and extreme weather; however, these guidelines will serve as a reference for Northwest Allen County Schools (NACS).
- NACS believes our community expects schools to be open and provide educational services as well as supervision and other services, such as meals, to its students.
- NACS believes all parents are committed to keeping children safe and these parents will dress their children appropriately for the existing weather conditions when sending their children to school.
- NACS recognizes that it is first and foremost a parental decision as to whether or not a child should attend school on inclement weather days.
- NACS respects the parent's determination regarding her/his child's attendance at school during inclement weather. If school is open, or delayed, because of inclement weather, the school will respect the parent's decision to keep their child at home. Parents are expected to contact the school and inform school officials of their determination, and the student will be counted as absent, per Indiana code. Students who are absent due to inclement weather will be given the opportunity to complete their academic work.

## Communication

- On a normal school day, a delay and/or closing will be announced no later than 6:30 a.m.
- Following a delay, if the need to close should arise, it will be announced no later than 8:30 a.m.
- Following the district's Twitter account, @NWAllenSchoolsFW, is the most immediate means of communication for school delays and/or closings and other information and news related to the district.
- Parents can also choose to provide a cell phone number and receive a text message about school delays and/or closings via the School Messenger service. For more information, please visit <https://www.nacs.k12.in.us/parents>.
- Delay/closing announcements can also be found on the NACS district's website at [www.nacs.k12.in.us](http://www.nacs.k12.in.us).
- Media outlets that are contacted and informed of the delay/close decision include:

WANE TV – Channel 15

BIG Radio – 92.3 FM

WLDE Radio – 101.7 FM

WPTA TV – Channel 21

WAJI Radio – 95.1 FM

WWFW Radio – 103.9 FM

WISE TV – Channel 33

WXKE Radio – 96.3 FM

K105 Radio – 105.1 FM

WFFT TV – Channel 55

WMEE Radio – 97.3 FM

WOWO Radio – 1190 AM

WBCL Radio – 90.3 FM

WBYS Radio – 98.9 FM

WGL Radio – 1250 AM

## Delaying or Closing School Is Based on Multiple Variables

The need for driving slower and allowing for additional travel time does not necessarily indicate that conditions are unsafe for travel to or from school. It is understood that varying interpretations and opinions exist in terms of a “right” decision regarding whether or not to delay the start of school, close early, or close for the entire day. However, before a decision is made, as much information is gathered as possible, and it is made within the beliefs communicated on the previous page of this document. NACS is comprised of three townships measuring about 108 square miles of northwestern Allen County; it is possible that one part of the district is experiencing safe conditions, while another part is not. Likewise, it is possible for other school districts to be experiencing different weather/road conditions than those within NACS. To prepare for the possibility of delayed schedules or school closings, please develop alternate plans for child care. Alternate child care plans should accommodate the possibility of:

- (a) school closing for the entire day;
- (b) the implementation of a delay schedule; and
- (c) the early closing of school.

The ultimate decision of whether school will be closed, delayed, or closed early is based on whether our buses can safely transport students on NACS roads. The decision on whether it is safe enough for teenagers to drive is a family decision between each parent and teenager.

### Two-Hour Delay

Delay schedules are two hours in length because a two-hour delay does not disrupt the end of the day schedule. Likewise, the earliest school can be dismissed without creating a need to make up the day is two hours early. Three-hour delays will likely not be considered unless the winter is severe and requires an abnormal number of school closings; in this case, three-hour delays may be implemented to decrease the need for additional make-up days in mid-June. As a reminder, in order to comply with state statute, three-hour delays also result in dismissal occurring one hour later than normal dismissal times.

### Make-Up Days

Indiana statute requires 180 days of instruction. Make-up days have been statutorily required since the mid-1980s. To comply with Indiana statute, each school closing will result in a make-up day.

### Freezing Rain/Sleet and Dense Fog

The most unpredictable weather variables are freezing rain/sleet and dense fog. Freezing rain/sleet is temperature sensitive and, like dense fog, fast-occurring. Each begins and ends with little notice. When freezing/rain sleet are predicted or when dense fog appears, the decision regarding whether or not school is delayed/closed will occur at the latest possible time in an effort to observe the most current and local conditions.

### Snowfall

Snowfall is more predictable than freezing rain/sleet. Meteorologists typically give predictions within 2 to 4-inch variances (i.e., predictions such as 1-3, 3-6, 4-8). Because of the variance in actual snowfall when compared to predicted snowfall, the decision regarding school status is not determined until the snow accumulation indicates a need for action. Such a decision, except in extreme situations, will generally be made in the morning.

### Extreme Snowfall Situations

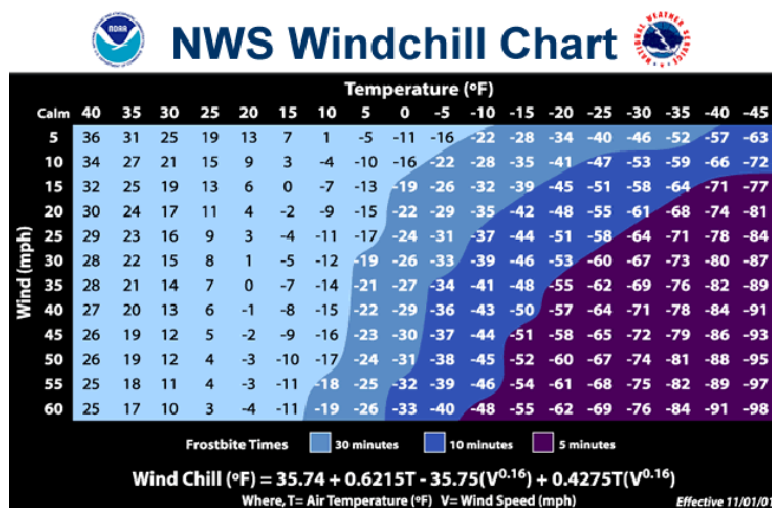
When snow accumulates to significant levels, or is at such a level with more snowfall predicted, then a decision regarding school delay/closing *may* be made the previous evening. A significant level is one in which local city, county, or state authorities have communicated directly with us that it is unlikely for streets, roads, or highways to be cleared and passable by the following morning.

## Extreme Cold (see included chart from the National Weather Service)

- Temperature prediction is increasingly more accurate. NACS uses the hourly temperature predictions for its zip code from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (noaa.gov – we check conditions from both Fort Wayne International and DeKalb County airports). NACS also uses the Wind Chill Chart from the NOAA and the National Weather Service (included with these guidelines) showing when frostbite becomes a concern if bare skin is exposed to frigid temperatures for varying amounts of time.
- If the air temperature, as predicted by NOAA, is expected to be –10 degrees Fahrenheit or colder at 6:30 a.m., then a two-hour delay **may** be considered in order to insure that all buses start and do not experience mechanical difficulties. If the air temperature remains at –10 degrees Fahrenheit or colder at 8:30 a.m., then school **may** be closed depending on how our buses are responding mechanically. Such a determination will be made as early as possible, including the possibility of being reported the previous evening.

## Extreme Wind Chill (see included chart from the National Weather Service)

- Wind chill predictions are not as accurate as temperature predictions because of the additional variable of wind speed and the variances in wind speed by time and location. While NOAA observations and predictions that we receive are based upon the open conditions at Fort Wayne International and DeKalb County airports, these conditions can vary from actual conditions within the district. Wind chills in areas that are protected from the open winds, such as conditions typically seen in areas with many buildings like a subdivision, have actual wind chill temperatures less than what is reported in the open conditions present at each of the referenced airports. Local observations will affect the decision regarding delaying or closing school.
- Using the Wind Chill Chart provided by NOAA and the National Weather Service, severe wind chill concerns or frostbite emerge at wind chill temperatures at or near –20 degrees Fahrenheit with 30 minutes or more of exposure. Since our walking zones typically are less than 30 minutes, with nearly all being less than 15 minutes, wind chills warmer than –20 degrees Fahrenheit typically mean we will remain on time or open. When wind chill temperatures are clearly and consistently colder than –30 degrees Fahrenheit, it is likely that we will delay or close. When wind chills are between these two extremes, then the decision will be made as late as possible in order to gather as much information about local conditions as possible. Regardless, the decision to delay or close is difficult because of the number of variables that account for the wind chill calculations as well as the variances observed throughout the district.



Below are answers to questions frequently asked during previous school years.

**Q. What are the delay options that will be considered in order to prevent make-up days?**

- A. 2-hour delays could be implemented. Please refer to information from your respective school in terms of starting and ending times for a 2-hour delay schedule. A 3-hour delay schedule will only be implemented if the severity of the winter warrants its use to decrease the number of make-up days and hopefully avoid the need of making up days beyond the established date of the high school graduation ceremony. If you have not already done so, please develop alternate plans for child care. Alternate child care plans should accommodate the possibility of ...
- (a) school closing for the entire day;
  - (b) the implementation of a delay schedule; and
  - (c) the early dismissal of school.

The ultimate decision of whether school will be closed, delayed, or closed early is based on whether our buses can safely transport students on NACS roads. The decision on whether it is safe enough for teenagers to drive is a family decision between each parent and teenager.

**Two-hour delays** are the most commonly used delay option because the State of Indiana requires a minimum number of days **and** a minimum number of minutes per day. A 2-hour delay complies with Indiana's emergency situation daily minimum minute requirement.

If a **3-hour delay** is implemented, which is possible in order to reduce the number of needed make-up days, an additional hour must also be added to the end of the instructional day. This additional hour at the end of the day is required in order to comply with Indiana's emergency situation daily minimum minute requirement. Because this option disrupts morning and afternoon family schedules, it will only be used during extreme winters to avoid additional make-up days.

**Early dismissals** are rarely implemented. If weather conditions warrant closing/dismissing school early, then school could be closed as early as two hours before normal dismissal times. This option may be used only if extreme weather conditions jeopardize the ability of NACS to safely transport students to their homes/bus stops at the end of the day. If school is closed early on the same day that began with a delay schedule, then the state does not count the day towards complying with the 180-day minimum requirement, and the entire day would need to be made up.

**Q. Is e-learning being considered as an option for making up days?**

- A. Yes, but much work must be completed before we can be approved to do so by the Department of Education (DOE) and the State Board of Education (SBOE). The first step is to insure that every student has access to high speed internet and a digital computing device that complies with minimum system requirements. The 2017-2018 school year was the first in which all K-12 students had access to a digital computing device. Unfortunately, some parts of the district still require access to a significant cellular data plan or a satellite dish to access high speed internet.

The second step is to design independent lessons that are comparable to the learning opportunities provided if school is in session and not comprised only of so-called "busy work." To complete this step, a great deal of time for course revision and redevelopment is necessary to convert learning activities into a digital presentation format that are meaningful and can be accessed and completed independently; this is a particularly difficult task to complete for our primary-aged children (K-3). We are committed to providing meaningful learning experiences for our students. We began the work of creating digitally-based learning activities to enhance, extend, and complement our more traditional learning activities before implementing 1:1 computing, and we began the process of preparing for e-learning days after integrating the 1:1 digital learning tools within our daily instructional activities. We began the process of applying for e-learning days in fall 2018. However, if the DOE and SBOE approve our e-learning application, then e-learning days will not become an option, unless an emergency waiver is approved by the DOE and SBOE, until at least the 2019-2020 school year unless we are granted an emergency approval which will likely not occur unless we endure a severe winter like the one we experienced in 2014.

**Q. Why do all of the school closings have to be made up?**

- A. The reason each school closing results in a make-up day is to comply with Indiana statute. Since the mid-1980s, the statutory requirement established by the Indiana General Assembly is that school will be in session for a minimum of 180 days. According to state statute, "public schools that do not conduct at least 180 instructional days during a school year shall have the subsequent August tuition support distribution reduced to reflect the actual amount of instructional days provided." Whenever the state provides alternate methods to make-up school closings, such as extending the school day, the alternate methods will be considered; however, it is rare that the state provides alternate methods for making up school closings.

**Q. Have steps been taken to reduce the need for extending the school year beyond the currently scheduled last day of school?**

A. Yes. The 2018-2019 NACS calendar includes four potential make-up days within the school year (potential make-up days for the 2018-2019 school year include December 21, February 25, March 15, and April 19). If these make-up days are not needed, then these days will be treated as holidays. However, if the number of required make-up days exceeds the number of built-in days, then yes, the school year will be extended beyond the originally scheduled last day of school, May 30, in order to comply with Indiana statutes regarding the minimum number of instructional days.

**Q. Can we extend each day a few minutes in order to make-up school closings?**

A. No. In addition to being open a minimum number of minutes each day, Indiana statute requires schools to be open for student instruction a minimum of 180 days. To allow the lengthening of school days to serve as an option for making up school closings, a change in current statute is required. During the 2013-2014 school year, the State granted waivers permitting this action. However, this option is not in statute and the waiver applied only to the 2013-2014 school year.

**Q. Will Saturdays be used for making up school closings?**

A. No. Consideration and investigation of this option was considered a few years ago. However, because of SAT and ACT test administrations, LEGO League/robotics team competitions, academic team competitions, speech and debate team competitions, band and choir contests, FFA and 4-H participation and competitions, culinary arts competitions, little league participation, Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts activities, IHSAA tournament games, track meets, tennis and golf matches, baseball and softball games, and numerous other school and personal family activities scheduled on Saturdays throughout February, March, April, May, and June, NACS will not recommend the implementation of Saturday school for the purposes of making up emergency/weather related school closings.

**Q. Will graduation be rescheduled?**

A. If the number of make-up days required by the State of Indiana extends beyond the current graduation date, then yes, graduation will be rescheduled so that all students can meet Indiana's attendance requirements and Indiana's graduation requirements before the ceremony. Our currently scheduled last day of school is May 30, and our currently scheduled date of graduation is June 9.

**Q. On some days when school is delayed or closed, my roads are fine, so why the delay or closing?**

A. NACS is comprised of 108 square miles within Eel River, Lake, and Perry Townships in Allen County. Although conditions may be fine in one geographic part of the district, another part may be experiencing unsafe conditions. Many times, conditions in the rural sections of the district are different than the conditions within the subdivisions. Weather forecasts and road conditions throughout the entire school district are evaluated before making a decision to delay or close school.

**Q. How are decisions about delaying and/or closing determined?**

A. The ultimate decision of whether school will be closed or delayed is based on whether our buses can safely transport students on NACS roads. The buses purchased by our school corporation maximize safety features to insure the safest possible transporting of our students. Likewise, our bus drivers participate in ongoing training opportunities to increase the likelihood of safe driving in various road conditions. Our buses and bus drivers must demonstrate proficiency by meeting statutory requirements as audited and measured by Indiana State Police on an annual basis. Despite the safety features of our buses and the training that our drivers receive, there are some road conditions that are not conducive for safe transporting of students. Typically, ice, drifting snow, and reduced visibility are the primary reasons for delays and closings.

Each morning between 4:30 a.m. and 6:30 a.m., road and weather conditions are monitored. At least three NACS employees drive NACS roads to determine actual road conditions. Each of the three employees drives on roads in different parts of the district so that a picture of the entire district is developed. We also obtain road condition reports from bus drivers as they travel to the transportation facility and to their pick-up locations. Additionally, weather reports from multiple sources are monitored as well as information from city, county, and state road crews. Our primary resource for weather information is the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration ([noaa.gov](http://noaa.gov) – we check conditions from both Fort Wayne International and DeKalb County airports).

Our goal is to make a decision regarding delays and closings by 6:00 a.m. each day. However, with changing road and weather conditions, sometimes the decision is made as late as 6:30 a.m. In some instances, a delay may be announced in order to afford more time to determine whether the changing road and weather conditions warrant a school closing. In these instances, a decision to close may be determined as late as 8:30 a.m. On days that a delay schedule is implemented and later changed to a closing, road conditions either worsened, or despite the best efforts of county, city, or state road crews, roadways were not adequately cleared or treated. Ultimately, school will be in session **only** if our bus drivers can safely navigate buses on the NACS roads that must be traveled to transport our students.