



Lexington Public Schools

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Dear Parents and Guardians:

Making the decision to call off school for snow is sometimes difficult. There are many variables, the least predictable and reliable of which is the weather forecast. The decision-making process involves many people and many considerations, though the final decision is mine.

Hindsight being 20/20, I should have closed schools last Friday. I regret that my decision adversely impacted many students, families, and employees. Let me assure you that I will work with the principals and central office administrators to analyze the process we use to close schools, or close schools early, and we will improve communication with parents. If you have suggestions, please send your ideas to your child's principal or to me at pash@sch.ci.lexington.ma.us.

I wish to personally thank all teachers, teaching assistants, secretaries, custodians, assistant principals and principals who stayed very late on Friday to make sure every child got home safely. Many people stayed past 6 p.m. in order to make sure that every child was picked up by his/her parents, or that his/her bus run was completed. These dedicated people made the safe dismissal from schools possible. I also want to thank the C & W Transportation Company, the Department of Public Works, and the Police and Fire Departments for their tireless efforts during Friday's snowstorm.

Some people have asked me how I go about making the decision to close schools when snow is predicted. At about 4:00 a.m., I check numerous weather reports for the Lexington area. Then I call Lexington's Department of Public Works to discuss road conditions and to request their assessment of whether the DPW can adequately plow sidewalks and roads before school opens. Usually, one school employee drives Lexington's streets and reports his/her findings to the Director of Facilities, who then contacts me. The Director of Facilities also lets me know if school grounds can be made safe by our facilities crew. Before 5:00 a.m., I call all the area superintendents to ask if they are opening or closing, and I ask for their assessment of the various weather forecasts. Based on all of this information, I decide whether to keep schools open or to close them. My highest priority is always the safety of children.

Last Friday was not a typical situation. At 4:00 a.m. it was not snowing, so the entire decision had to be based on the various weather forecasts. I had one hour to make the decision before it would be too late to stop the buses from leaving the depot. Meteorologists, at the time, were predicting 6 to 10 inches to accumulate by 6:00 p.m. By 5:00 a.m., most of the superintendents east of Route 128 had decided to keep school open, since their respective DPW departments said they could handle the storm. The DPW assessments were right — they could handle 6 to 10 inches of snow falling in a 12-hour period. Unfortunately, the weather prediction was wrong. Not only did we receive 14 inches of snow, but all of it hit Lexington much earlier than predicted. By 2:00 p.m., we were experiencing whiteout conditions.

It is no comfort that most of my colleagues within Route 128 made the same decision to keep school open. Although we try our best, sometimes we make mistakes.

Ultimately, the decision to close school is a judgment call based on my experience as a Superintendent. I want to assure you that we will respect your decision to keep your children at home if you are concerned about their safety in adverse weather conditions.

I cannot promise that we will never face similar circumstances, but I can assure you that we will use Friday's experience to improve our school closing procedures in the future. Thank you for your help and understanding.

Sincerely,

Paul B. Ash, Ph.D.
Superintendent of Schools

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