

Bismarck Public Schools values the safety of all of its students and staff. As per law, there are two snow days built into the annual district calendar.

- Bismarck Public Schools will make weather-related decisions no later than 6 am.
- In some cases BPS may decide to cancel school the night before or have a 2-hour late school start in the morning.
- BPS does NOT cancel school once classes are in session. Many parents do not have flexible work schedules. We do not want children walking to and from school or to and from a bus stop alone. It is better if parents can be there to assist their children or drive them to school that day. We also do not want young children to be unsupervised at home.

If we feel most children can get to school, we will have classes. We consider these factors:

- Can most students and staff get to school in the morning? (as per 5:30-6 am weather)
- Can the majority of buses pick up bused students before school?
- While at school, will students be warm, safe and fed?
- Do we feel buses can get students home at the end of the day?
- NOTE: we do not consider cost. If we lose state aid for not having school one day, we get it back on the make-up day, so money is never a consideration in our decision.

Here are 3 scenarios:

1. An announcement is made canceling school for the following day.
2. An announcement is made about a 2 hour late start for the following day.
3. If a decision is NOT made the day prior, this will occur on a potential storm day:

- **4 AM**

1. School staff drive each quadrant of the city. As Bismarck has gotten larger, not all areas of the city have the same road conditions, snow depth, visibility, etc.
2. BPS is in contact with public and private school superintendents in Bismarck and Mandan, Bismarck State College, and United Tribes.
3. BPS contacts the following, if needed: Harlow's Bus Service, Bismarck City Public Works Department (snow removal), and Burleigh County Engineer (roads).
4. NOTE: emergency routes are cleared 1st; routes around schools are cleared 2nd.

- **5 AM**

The Business & Operations Manager contacts the Superintendent. A decision is made to:

1. **Have school; buses will run. Normal day.**
2. **Have school: buses will run where possible.**
 - "Buses where possible" means while most routes in the BPS district are passable, some may be problematic. If you think the bus won't make it into your area/neighborhood, consider driving your child to school or stay home. If a bus cannot get to a bus stop or is running behind schedules, Harlow's should send a notification to impacted families on that route.
3. **Have a 2-hour late start in the morning.**
4. **Not have school.**

- **6 AM**
 1. **If BPS is having school and buses are running, we will NOT notify you.**
 2. **If there are changes to the normal school day, as outlined in #2-4 above, BPS will communicate in the following manner:**
 - All BPS staff are notified first via email, text and/or phone, as some go to work early, like cooks, bus drivers/riders, custodians, etc.
 - Parents are notified after staff via email, text and/or phone.
 - Announcements are put on the BPS web page, www.bismarckschools.org, and on our social media pages like Facebook and Twitter.
 - Local news media are contacted; BPS is responsible for entering its own data into their scrolling weather information bars, so that takes time to enter.
 3. BPS may continue to have classes at the **Career Academy**, even if Bismarck State College closes, so watch for a message from your high school or Career Academy.

Staying home from school (excused absences):

BPS respects parents' rights to determine if going to school from their particular home with their circumstances makes sense or not. It is a parent responsibility to wait at the bus stop with their children or decide to take the child to school that day and notify Harlow's of that change in plans. We do not provide staff at bus stops.

Parents must make the decision on whether to keep their child home on days when weather is inclement. Sometimes school is the safest place for the child to be. Weather-related "tardies" will generally be excused due to slower travel.

If there is no "weather related absence" granted on a particular day, parents with a weather-related hardship can appeal to the principal for a waiver of the attendance exception due to weather. Principals will likely ask if other children in the same home made it to school, if parents were available to drive their student to school, and if other children in the neighborhood made it to school. Justifiable hardship weather-related waivers will be granted.

That said, parents of high school students should think carefully about using a weather-related excused absence as a way to circumvent the test exemption policy. Here are some tips:

- When it's a school day, teachers will be teaching and students will miss the material.
- Students may have to make up missed material by attending a required tutorial session.
- Parents may choose to drive their students to and from school or follow them home.
- Students who are not present in class cannot participate in that day's extracurricular activities such as practices, concerts, sporting events, plays, etc.

Thanks for working with us to adequately prepare your students for college and careers!

Parents:

Please resist the temptation to be verbally inappropriate when you call or visit a school and are upset about a weather decision made at the district level. There are often children around who can hear you, and it is not appropriate to take your frustrations out on our secretarial staff, for example. Also, please refrain from posting negative or derogatory comments on social media.

Again, you are the adult role model for our youth and many of them check our Facebook and Twitter sites for weather information. Instead, please share your concerns with the Superintendent's office, 701-323-4054, or Community Relations, 701-323-4091.

BPS School Staff:

Every winter weather emergency is different and we will treat them as such, but typically:

Teachers: if teaching staff cannot make it to work on a stormy day, they may take personal leave. If a significant storm develops during the school day, teachers can leave after their students are dismissed and not have to use leave time. If teachers leave prior to the end of the school day when students are still present in the building, they need to use personal leave for the absence if it exceeds an hour. If it is under an hour, the district will waive it. Always let your supervisor/principal know your plans.

The two hour late start means that students can arrive 2 hours late. Schools need to be prepared for any students showing up early, this is a safety precaution for all students. Staff members who can make it to the building to help supervise students dropped off early are appreciated.

Hourly Staff: if hourly staff cannot make it to work on a stormy day, they may stay home and take personal/vacation leave. If a significant storm develops during the school day and hourly staff members leave early, they must make up the time during the same week or use leave time. Always let your supervisor/principal know your plans.

Work-related questions from BPS staff should be directed to Human Resources:

<https://www.bismarckschools.org/Page/1536>

4 Winter Weather Categories: National Weather Service

www.nws.noaa.gov/om/winter/ww.shtml

ADVISORY: wintry weather is expected. Exercise caution. Light amounts of wintry precipitation or patchy blowing snow will cause slick conditions and could affect travel if precautions are not taken. (Weather may present a hazard but does not meet warning criteria.)

WATCH: snow, sleet or ice is possible so be prepared. Confidence is “medium” that a winter storm could produce heavy snow, sleet, or freezing rain and cause significant impacts. Watches are usually issued in advance of a storm, usually at least 24 hours.

WARNING: snow, sleet or ice is expected; take action. Confidence is “high” that a winter storm will produce heavy snow, sleet or freezing rain and cause significant impacts. (Warnings indicate that heavy snow of at least 6 inches in 12 hours, or at least 8 inches in 24 hours, is expected. It can also be issued if sleet accumulation will be at least ½ of an inch.)

BLIZZARD: issued for frequent gusts of 35 mph or greater accompanied by falling and/or blowing snow, frequently reducing visibility to less than ¼ of a mile for 3 hours or more. A Blizzard Warning means severe winter weather conditions are expected or occurring.

3 Winter Travel Categories: North Dakota Department of Transportation

- Please note that these alerts or advisories may change in the morning once the sun is up, which may be later than 7 or 7:30 am. BPS must make its decision on having or not having school and/or busing by 6 am, so a “No Travel Advised” announcement has been known to change to a “Travel Alert” later in the morning after we make our decision.

1. **TRAVEL ALERT** – Motorists can still travel but may encounter areas of challenging winter weather driving conditions on roadways. Motorists should allow extra time to reach their destination and be alert to conditions that may make travel difficult, change rapidly, or cause travel delays.
2. **NO TRAVEL ADVISED** – Motorists should not travel due to hazardous conditions that may make it unsafe to travel. Snowplows may be pulled from the roads during severe conditions. Motorists should take NO TRAVEL ADVISED seriously as those motorists who choose to travel at their own risk may become stranded and emergency responders may not be able to reach them safely. A NO TRAVEL ADVISED has the potential to change to a ROAD CLOSED OR BLOCKED if conditions deteriorate.
3. **ROAD CLOSED OR BLOCKED** – Motorists are not allowed to travel on a closed road due to life threatening conditions. The road may be impassible or blocked. Motorists who drive past a road closure device may be fined up to \$250.