

# Snow in the Forecast

## How do we make the decision to delay or close in West York?

From time to time, people will ask me how in the world the decision is made to close school, call a delay, or start on time. I should begin by saying that when fall turns to winter, watching the weather is the last thing I do before retiring at night and the first thing I do upon waking. It is an extremely stressful aspect of the job of a Superintendent because safety is paramount for our children and staff. This includes bus riders, walkers, teenage drivers, and staff, especially those who are coming from homes outside the district.

An Accu-Weather service contacts me at 4:30 a.m. when any questionable weather is coming our way. The live conversation with a forecaster provides me with the opportunity to ask specific questions regarding the speed of the storm, when exactly it will arrive in our area of the county, and if the temperature will drop below freezing in our district. This service is invaluable.

Following that conversation, I contact two different individuals who are both driving around our district in order to provide me with up-to-the-minute conditions on main and back roads. This aspect of the decision is extremely helpful, particularly after the storm has passed. I immediately know many specific things about conditions in West York such as if the roads have iced over during the night; if some streets have not been plowed; if the volume of snow has not been pushed back enough at the intersections to allow the buses to make proper turns; how soon our district maintenance staff can get our lots cleared; if certain streets are flooded; and if any building is without power.

The most difficult decisions are those that I must make in the early morning when the storm has not yet begun. In these situations, I must rely completely on the accuracy of the forecaster. I also consider what the districts around us are doing, particularly those with a similar terrain. Finally, I sometimes solicit information from the West York Borough or West Manchester Township maintenance staff and, of course, both television and online weather reports are checked the entire time. With all the information on-hand, I make the decision and begin the calls to staff, families, and television stations.

If the storm strikes in the evening, the decision is considerably easier. Unfortunately, Mother Nature can be difficult to predict, and that sometimes causes forecasters to be less precise than I need them to be when determining whether or not to close or delay schools. Occasionally, that may result in what seems like a needless change to our school schedule. Please know that the decision was made with the most up-to-date and accurate information available and with student safety as a top priority.

We appreciate all that our parents/guardians do to assist us on these days. They help by establishing prearranged alternate child care in the event of a closing; ensuring their children are dressed appropriately by factoring in the time they will spend outdoors traveling to school; and talking with teenagers who drive to school about safe travels on hazardous roads and whether it is safe to drive that day. As we traverse the cold winter months together, please know that I will be awake late and up early trying to make the best, most informed decisions concerning the safety of your children and our staff.

*Dr. Emilie Lonardi, Superintendent*