



## **Safety FAQs: School Closings, Early Dismissal or Delayed Opening**

When severe weather is forecast, Houston County school district officials continuously monitor the weather. Safety is our number one priority, and decisions are based on what is best for all our school families. District administrators carefully and thoughtfully make decisions about school closings or time changes. We watch the weather and gather information to make the best decision for all students and staff based on the facts known at the time.

The Houston County School System has an established process that is followed whenever inclement weather necessitates a possible school closing, early dismissal or delayed opening. Information follows to describe the steps taken in the event of severe weather.

### **Q. Who monitors the weather?**

A. The central office leadership team monitors the weather closely. The superintendent of schools and his designees stay in close communication with the Houston Emergency Management Agency (HEMA) during times of inclement weather and follow several weather forecast models.

### **Q. Who makes the decision to close or remain open?**

A. The superintendent of schools decides if the school schedule will change or remain the same.

### **Q. Where does the weather information come from?**

A. A variety of forecast models are reviewed, to include the National Weather Service, High Resolution Rapid Refresh, and Global Forecasting System. District administrators attend frequent weather briefings held by HEMA, during which the Georgia Emergency Management Agency provides a briefing and advice.

Once the weather impacts the area, the superintendent continues to gather information in many ways to decide when it is safe to return to schools. In addition to weather forecasts, this includes: driving the roads; checking school campuses; obtaining reports from the district's maintenance and transportation departments; and talking with community partners such as law enforcement, HEMA, county public works, Robins Air Force Base and other central Georgia school districts.

### **Q. What factors are considered?**

A. Safety is always the first and foremost consideration for our approximately 30,000 students and 5,000 employees. Houston County is a large geographic area covering 380 square miles, and the entire county is considered since dangerous conditions that are not apparent in some areas may exist in others.

Specifically, the following factors are considered:

- weather forecast for snow, ice, hurricane, flooding, etc.
- temperature and wind chill
- predicted road conditions
- time of day weather will impact the community
- Georgia governor's State of Emergency list of counties impacted by the weather

After the weather hits, these factors also come into play when determining if it is safe to reopen:

- safe use of roads to include possibility of downed power lines or ice
- availability of electricity and water
- facility conditions of roofs, driveways, parking lot, sidewalks, etc.

**Q. When is the decision made to close or remain open?**

A. The timing of the decision will vary based on the circumstances, changing weather forecasts and lead time allowed by Mother Nature for the weather prediction. The decision is typically made no later than 5:00 a.m.

**Q. How are families and other community members notified?**

A. If there is any change to routine school operations, our families and employees will be notified through our automated notification system, School Messenger. Announcements will be posted to our website, [www.hcbe.net](http://www.hcbe.net), district [Facebook](#) and district [Twitter](#) accounts and shared with the local media outlets.

Before severe weather strikes, please [log into Infinite Campus through the parent portal](#) to check your phone numbers listed for general and emergency notifications. [Click here](#) to learn more about this parent portal. Please follow our social media accounts and bookmark our school district website — [www.hcbe.net](http://www.hcbe.net) — to keep informed.

***Please note: If our families do not get a call, or there is no special message posted on the website and social media that school is closed, then the district is open as usual!***

**Q. What if school is dismissed early?**

A. If school is dismissed early, our students will be sent home in the usual manner, whether by bus, car rider, walker, etc. It is impossible for the school or district staff to accept phoned directions during emergency closures. Parents are asked to plan in advance in the event there is an early dismissal. Please ensure that children know what to do in case of an emergency. If school is dismissed early, the same communication methods listed above for school closures will be implemented.

**Q. What happens if the school opening time is delayed?**

A. If the school start time is delayed due to safety conditions, the same routine as usual would be followed, but at the revised time. If the opening of school is delayed, the same communication methods listed above for school closures will be implemented.

**Q. Where may I obtain additional information?**

A. For more information, send an email to the webmaster email account at [webmaster@hcbe.net](mailto:webmaster@hcbe.net) or call the central office at 478-988-6200. Your question will be forwarded to the appropriate department for a response.

***Please note: The district will be unable to respond to phone calls, emails or social media messages/posts during inclement weather events.***