

Blue Ridge CUSD 18

Emergency Closings – Why, When, and How

Updated 2/11/2019

Many factors go into the decision whether or not to call off school for bad weather or some other emergency. Weather can be unpredictable, and often it is a judgment call as to the timing of storms and whether conditions warrant a closing.

The primary consideration is always the safety of students. Blue Ridge covers 212 square miles, so sometimes weather is clear in one part of the district, but problematic in another.

Weather reports and information from the Emergency Management System are monitored closely. Road commissioners in our area provide input. The superintendent, transportation director, and mechanic drive roadways to evaluate road conditions.

If cold temperatures or wind chills are an issue, then we keep in mind that students may be waiting for buses in rural areas, and that if a bus were to break down, in some cases it could take 20-30 minutes for a replacement bus to reach them.

Timing of storms can make a big difference in how school closings are handled. If it is clear that bad weather is on the way, we will make every effort to call off school the night before. Many times, however, weather predictions are less sure and we need to evaluate condition in the early morning.

In some cases, storms arrive once students are at school. If it appears that the storm will end in time for crews to clear roads before school dismisses, then we will keep students in school for the full day. If it appears that the situation will only continue throughout the day and road conditions are expected to deteriorate, then we will dismiss early in an effort to ensure students make it home safely. Families are encouraged to make plans for these types of situations and communicate them with their child's school.

Once a decision is made families, school personnel, and media outlets are notified. School closing information is posted on the district website, smartphone app, and Facebook and Twitter pages. Telephone calls are sent out via the Apptegy system. We avoid phone calls before 6 a.m. as a courtesy to those who may not want to be disturbed.

Frequently Asked Questions

Why not use late starts for school or only run shuttle routes between the 3 towns?

Although late starts would be useful on some days when conditions are expected to improve early in the day, it has drawbacks. Families may have greater difficulty finding childcare for a couple hours instead of an entire day. Some students may misunderstand and find themselves waiting at a bus stop or outside at a school for extra time in bad weather.

Why not run shuttle-buses only, and cancel the country bus routes?

Schools must be open and available for all students. We cannot be open for only some of them.

Could we make use of remote learning days (AKA e-learning days, digital learning days) instead of snow days?

Blue Ridge is evaluating this option. Remote learning days could provide continuity of instruction for our students, particularly on bad weather days. We have the appropriate technology in-house to support this initiative, but want to ensure that it is a valuable and productive for our students. Many of our high school students currently use digital learning options for credit recovery and within the alternative education program. A survey was sent to our community to ask for their input (results are posted at <https://5il.co/6i85>). The BR technology committee is reviewing the information and whether this is a good option for future use. Our goal isn't simply to avoid making up a day at the end of the year, though. We want to look at whether this supports student learning. One school of thought is that it's better to provide meaningful and continuous instruction than to tack on school days at the end of the year. Others are not so sure that students will be doing comparable work on what would have previously been a "snow day". A lot of it is in the actual implementation, so we will put some time into thinking it through.

Why do we sometimes have evening activities when school was closed that day?

We continue to default to the policy of no school=no evening activities, but try to look at this issue in a flexible manner. There are times when weather conditions improve considerably through the day. In those cases, we may proceed with some or all of the evening activities, and send out notifications to the school community as early as possible.

District Website and School District App!

Check out our website at www.blueridge18.org. It's a work in progress, but we hope you find it easier to navigate. Also, download our phone app from Google Play or Apple Store (search for Blue Ridge 18). The app will send you push notifications and help you stay up to date on the latest happenings!

You do not need the app to receive SMS and voice calls. Contact information is uploaded from Skyward/Qmlativ, so you only need to make sure your information is current in the Skyward/Qmlativ system.