

CAMBRIDGE PUBLIC SCHOOLS



MARY LOU MCGRATH
Superintendent of Schools

159 THORNDIKE STREET, CAMBRIDGE, MASSACHUSETTS 02141
(617) 349-6494

TO: Robert Healy
City Manager

FROM: Mary Lou McGrath 
Superintendent of Schools

DATE: August 29, 1995

RE: School Closing Policy

Standard Procedure For Each School Closing/Late Opening

On days when weather necessitates the closing of our schools, we institute the following notification process.

1. Closing decision made by approximately 5:00 a.m. by Superintendent, Deputy Superintendent in consultation with City Manager, other school departments.
2. Telephone tree in place for calls to notify key staff, including Director of Public Information.
3. Director of Public Information and Deputy Superintendent notify media that schools will be closed. We aim to complete this process by 6:00 a.m.

- Stations notified include: WBZ (tv channel 4 and am radio), WCVB-TV (Channel 5), WHDH-TV (Channel 7), WBUR radio, WVBF radio, WXKS radio, WRKO radio, WMJX radio, WLYN radio, Associated Press and United Press International, and Radio Concorde (a Haitian station).
- Each station has a special code, unique to each school system, which callers are required to give to verify the veracity of the call.
- The station then updates their broadcast list and broadcasts the information.
- The Director of Public Information also places a school closing announcement on the School Department Telephone Link Line (349-6513).

School Closing Occurrence This Year

On February 28, 1995 the decision to close schools was made. The notification process was instituted. Several problems occurred in the process — all related to the media outlets themselves. While every outlet was notified before 6:20 AM, two TV stations, because of their own internal glitches, did not list the Cambridge Schools for at least another hour. Director of Public Information James Ball made additional calls to the stations to rectify the situation.

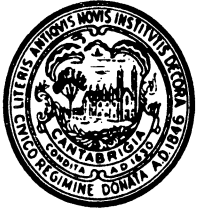
Mr. Ball has spoken to the stations involved to apprise them of the problems, and is working to make sure they do not occur again. In addition, he is exploring possibilities for a better telephone system, possibly a more advanced voice mail system which will serve a number of other information purposes for the School Department, but will help relieve the overcrowding that occurs on the Link Line.

Evidently, parents complained that a few students were dropped off at the High School despite the weather and indicated that the students were unable to get into the High School. High School Security Staff members were on duty at 7:00 AM that morning and in fact, spoke with students and answered calls about the closing. We have reminded security staff who would be in the building, even upon a closing, that they should allow students inside to enable them to make telephone calls for transportation arrangements to return home. In addition, there is a public phone on Cambridge Street just outside the High School which may be used in the event of a problem.

The problem is more difficult at the elementary schools because there is no staff generally on hand during a school closing. Custodial staff may be at the school, but may not be readily available to deal with students because of other duties. We will notify custodial staff to be on the lookout for children who may be waiting outside.

We will re-inform parents and guardians that the best alternatives when there is a question on the weather is to check the media and the Link Line.

I do not see the problem as a major one, however. This February closing is the first I can remember where we had a problem. I believe the problem can be addressed through the steps I have outlined above and more timely listings by the media.



CITY OF CAMBRIDGE

CAMBRIDGE, MASSACHUSETTS 02139

TEL. 349-4300

FAX. 349-4307

EXECUTIVE DEPARTMENT
ROBERT W. HEALY
City Manager

RICHARD C. ROSSI
Deputy City Manager

September 11, 1995

To The Honorable, The City Council:

Please find attached a response to Awaiting Report Item No. 17, regarding the policy of school closings, received from Mary Lou McGrath, Superintendent of Schools.

Very truly yours,

Robert W. Healy
City Manager

RWH/mec
attachment

Consent Agenda Item Number 25

S-280
Response to Awaiting Report Item Number
Seventeen regarding the policy of school
closings.

*for original see
1995 City Manager
Requests #91.*

In City Council,

Sept. 11, 1995

Placed on file