North Harford Zone
Work Group
Presentation
PURPOSE

REVIEW, DISCUSS, EVALUATE, AND DEVELOP RECOMMENDATIONS REGARDING THE APRIL 28, 2008 STUDY OF THE PROPOSED NORTH HARFORD ZONE
1. In 2008, community stakeholders suggested that HCPS create a North Harford inclement weather ZONE

2. In 2008, HCPS evaluated the need for establishing a ZONE by considering several factors

3. In 2014, community stakeholders suggested that HCPS create a ZONE

4. In 2014, the Superintendent tasked staff to review the 2008 North Harford Zone Study

5. The North Harford Zone Workgroup was formed including stakeholders from various regions across the county
**TASKS**

Review April 28, 2008
Zone Study

1. Review inclement weather decision process and Transportation Department inclement weather procedures

2. Review factors that impact the decision to create a ZONE

3. Review practice in Maryland schools

4. Review options and formulate recommendations
Results: Review of the 2008 ZONE Study showed that on April 28, 2008, the Superintendent’s presentation and recommendation to the Board was that a ZONE not be established.

Results: Review of HCPS procedures showed that flexibility exists within the current process and practice; and perceived concerns are being evaluated, considered, addressed, and student and employee safety are considered first and foremost.

Results: Review of HCPS procedures showed that HCPS’ decision-making process is directly linked to the practices and decisions made by local and state governments when responding to a weather event.

Results: Review of practices of other Maryland school systems found that weather zones have been established but are very rarely utilized.
Results: Review found that factors evaluated can be grouped into one of three categories and are currently considered during a weather event:
- Safety requirements
- Academic program requirements
- Logistical requirements

Results: Review found that the complexities associated with attendance boundaries make the use of weather zones impractical due to the adverse impact on students and programs across the entire school district.

Results: Review showed that student and employee safety are heavily considered, first and foremost, and that complexities associated with the following make creating zones impractical:
- Bus and school schedules
- Contractor bus lot locations
- Requirements for countywide Special Education and Magnet programs
1. The North Harford Zone Workgroup supports the April 28, 2008 recommendation to not create a North Harford Zone

2. The North Harford Zone Workgroup does not support the creation of multiple zones throughout the County (i.e., North Harford, Havre de Grace, Bel Air, Edgewood)

3. The North Harford Zone Workgroup recommends that HCPS continue current practice with additional communication and notification to community stakeholders
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REVIEW OF NORTH HARFORD ZONE STUDY

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Purpose:

In April of 2008, a study was conducted to investigate the viability of creating a separate “inclement weather zone” (ZONE) in the northern part of Harford County. The results of the study were that a separate ZONE would neither be required or practical. In response to recent public comment on this topic, the Superintendent directed staff to review that study to determine whether or not recent weather patterns or other circumstances have changed, necessitating the creation of a separate ZONE in the northern part of the County. Under this direction, representatives from various geographic locations in the County were invited to provide input to staff, and the North Harford Zone Workgroup (Workgroup) was established and met on November 6 and November 20, 2014. Under this effort, the Workgroup agreed with the results of the 2008 study. The members suggested that additional communication and notification to community stakeholders during an inclement weather event could be of benefit to the general public.

Tasks:

1. Review the previous Study of the Proposed North Harford Zone presented to the Board of Education of Harford County on April 28, 2008 (Exhibit A)

   - In past years, and in response to inclement weather events, various stakeholders of the Harford County Public Schools’ (HCPS) community have suggested that HCPS establish a “North Harford Zone” that would be utilized to provide additional flexibility in the decision-making process related to closing schools, delaying the opening of schools, or calling for an early dismissal due to inclement weather in the northern area of the County.

   - On April 28, 2008, the administration for HCPS evaluated the need for establishing a ZONE similar to the “Hereford Zone” established by Baltimore County Public Schools. Under this initial evaluation, the benefits, drawbacks, and overall impact to students’ education were considered.

   - On February 3, 2014, Harford County experienced a significant weather event that did not occur as forecasted. The timing and nature of the event resulted in an initial decision to open all schools, and the subsequent change in this decision was to call for an early morning dismissal. As in the past, various HCPS community stakeholders suggested that HCPS establish
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a ZONE for the North Harford area of the County. Under the direction of the Superintendent, the North Harford Zone Workgroup was formed and tasked to review the April 28, 2008, presentation to the Board and to determine whether or not recent weather patterns or other circumstances have changed, necessitating the creation of a ZONE.

Results: The review of the presented data showed that the drawbacks and problems caused to students and their learning environment would outweigh any potential benefit. The Superintendent’s recommendation to the Board was that a “North Harford Zone” not be established.

2. Review current decision-making process for inclement weather delays and closures (Exhibit B)

- HCPS procedure, protocol, and practice for evaluating the impact that weather events have on students and teachers in the classroom, employees in the workplace, and the general community were reviewed by the North Harford Zone Workgroup. Included in this evaluation was a review of the following:
  o tasks performed by the HCPS administration before, during, and after an inclement weather event
  o decision-making process and timing associated with inclement weather delays and closures
  o communication strategies and community notification
  o school readiness and staff response requirements (i.e., transportation and snow removal)

Results: The review of current HCPS inclement weather and snow removal procedures, communication, and decision-making protocol showed that flexibility currently exists within the current process related to closing schools, delaying the opening of schools, or calling for an early dismissal due to inclement weather in the North Harford area and throughout the County.

3. Review current Transportation Department’s inclement weather procedures (Exhibit B)

- HCPS Transportation Department’s procedure, protocol, and practice associated with student transportation services were reviewed by the North Harford Zone Workgroup. Included in this evaluation was a review of the following:
  o current transportation procedures, protocol, standards, and practices followed to ensure the safe transportation of students during an inclement weather event
  o HCPS owned and operated transportation model and delivery of services
  o HCPS bus contractor owned transportation model and delivery of services
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**REVIEW OF NORTH HARFORD ZONE STUDY**

**Results:** The review of current HCPS Transportation Department’s inclement weather procedures found that student and employee safety are heavily considered first and foremost before, during, and at the conclusion of a weather event. An additional review of the HCPS transportation delivery model revealed the complexities associated with the following components make creating a ZONE impractical:

- bus and school schedules
- contractor bus lot locations
- varied transportation responsibilities associated with the HCPS delivery model for special education programs and the contracted bus services delivery model for general education programs
- countywide programs including magnet schools

4. Identify and review the factors that would impact the decision to create zones

- Various criteria and factors that are considered and evaluated during an inclement weather event were reviewed and discussed by the North Harford Zone Workgroup. Included in this review was the following data:
  - weather conditions (snow, rain, wind, other)
  - geography
  - road conditions
  - safety criteria
  - student data
  - school data
  - program data (general education, magnet, special education, and out-of-county placement programs)
  - logistics and decision making (timing, coordination, and communication)
  - forecasting
  - transportation activities
  - snow removal activities
  - HCPS and Harford County Government coordination
  - general property ownership issues

**Results:** The review of the above found that factors to be evaluated and considered can be grouped into three categories:

1) safety requirements
2) academic program requirements
3) logistical requirements
Additionally, it was determined that safety factors are heavily considered during the evaluation of the impact that an inclement weather event may have on students, employees, and the general public. Further review of complexities associated with the delivery of student transportation services for academic programs to include magnet schools, countywide programs, and out-of-county placements. In addition, those associated with school attendance boundaries found that the creation of zones and any decision that might be made to close only those HCPS schools within a single zone would create an adverse impact to students and programs across the entire school district.

5. Review current practices of Maryland public school systems that have implemented zones *(Exhibit C)*

- Current practices of other local education agencies (LEA’s) and the Harford County Government during an inclement weather event were reviewed and discussed by the North Harford Zone Workgroup. Included in this review were the following:
  o Which LEA’s have established area weather zones
  o How often other school districts utilize zones when deciding school delays and closures
  o Operational practices of local and state governments during an inclement weather event

**Results:** The review of the current practice of Maryland school systems found that, even though a few systems have established inclement weather zones, these school systems have very rarely utilized the ZONE system when making the decision to close schools or to delay the opening of schools. Additionally, discussions on the operational practices of local and state agencies found that the HCPS’ decision-making process is directly linked to the decisions that governmental agencies make relative to the management of resources when responding to a weather event.

An example of this connection can be seen when considering the impact that the snow plowing operation of the Department of Public Works (DPW) for Harford County Government has on HCPS’ decision to open or close schools the morning after a snow event. The impact of the following scenarios, and the fact that each would result in a different HCPS decision, was discussed.

Scenario A: DPW snow plowing operations are complete; public roads are clear and ready.
Scenario B: DPW snow plowing operations have yet to begin; public roads are not clear.
6. Review options and formulate recommendations that address the need for a Harford County Public School Inclement Weather Zone.

- The need to establish a ZONE(s) was reviewed and discussed by the North Harford Zone Workgroup. It was agreed to consider the following options:

  o Establish a ZONE for the North Harford area ONLY  
    **Results:** The North Harford Zone Workgroup supports the Superintendent’s April 28, 2008, recommendation to not create a North Harford Zone

  o Establish MULTIPLE zones for several areas throughout the County  
    **Results:** The North Harford Zone Workgroup does not support the creation of multiple zones throughout the County (i.e., North Harford, Havre de Grace, Bel Air, Edgewood)

  o Continue current practice without change  
    **Results:** The North Harford Zone Workgroup acknowledges that HCPS’ current practice, protocols, and procedures provide the flexibility, resources, and criteria necessary to effectively manage and implement the decision-making process related to closing schools, delaying the opening of schools, or calling for an early dismissal due to inclement weather in all areas of Harford County.

Additionally, as presented on April 28, 2008, the drawbacks and problems that would be caused to all of the students affected, especially to their learning environment, would outweigh any potential benefit. It is understood that safety will never be compromised regardless of which course of action is implemented.

It is with this in mind that the North Harford Zone Workgroup recommends that HCPS continue current practice as follows:

- HCPS develop and issue weather-related messages and notifications that clearly explain the decision to open schools, close schools, delay the opening of schools, or call for an early dismissal due to inclement weather in ANY area of Harford County.