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The Bradford - Orange  
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## When is having a “cold day” appropriate?

Over the course of ten days last month, the outside temperature fluctuated by more than sixty degrees. One Thursday, the weather was sunny with a low of one degree; by Monday, it was sunny with a high of 62. In fact, it was warmer in Wellesley than in Los Angeles. I checked. And that’s one of the beauties of the New England climate. We may not have much of of spring, but weather changes are dramatic.

This sentiment is captured in an old idiom attributed to Mark Twain: *If you don’t like the weather in New England now, just wait a few minutes*. I may dislike the cold, but this exciting climatic variability may keep me in the Bay State later in life.

On January 22, Superintendent David Lussier decided to delay opening of the public schools by two hours. Though icy, the temperature did *not* sink as low as on January 31, when Lussier decided *not* to delay despite pressure from students at the high school and neighboring districts doing so. What explains the inconsistency? When is it appropriate to delay (or cancel) school due to very cold weather?

It seems to be that if the ambient temperature, there should be at least *consideration* of a delay or cancellation. Why? Because when it gets that cold (especially with a wind chill), it can be genuinely dangerous to walk to school—even for a few hundred yards. Moreover, cars and buses may not start, and, if they do, road conditions are often dangerous.

Delays allow for air to warm, for engines to get going, for vehicles to heat, and for more sunlight to illuminate icy spots on the road. Though inconvenient, they are a good compromise and a safe option for painfully chilly days. How’s this idea?: If the temperature by 8:00 AM is forecasted at eight degrees or lower, a two-hour delay for all public schools is automatically called.

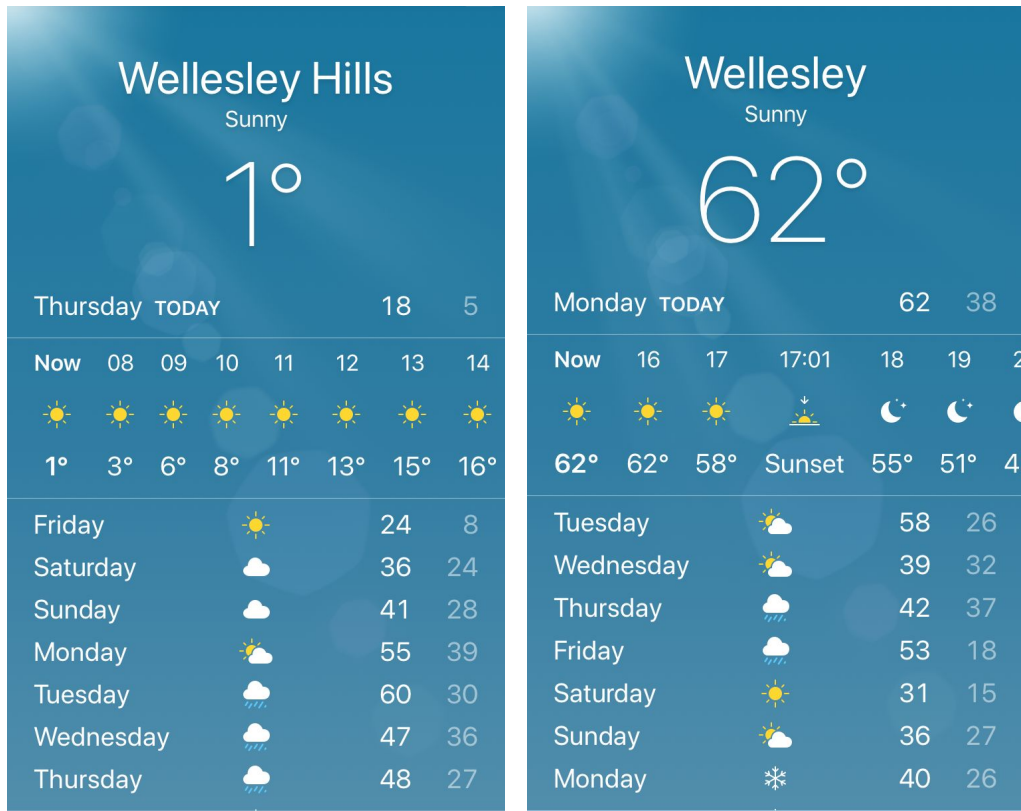
What about the very rare occasion of a “cold day”?—something superintendents across the Midwest were dealing with in February. When is it appropriate to outright *cancel* school for the entire day due to frigid temperatures? How about this benchmark?: Zero degrees or below as forecasted by 8:00 AM.

According to the [National Weather Service](#), at that temperature with average wind speeds, frostbite can arise in just thirty minutes, which is a real risk should a vehicle break down on the road. Most students (including myself) wear light (or non-existent) jackets because often we walk only a short distance in the cold to a heated bus or car that arrives at a heated school where nobody uses lockers.

I’ll admit that I didn’t always think this way. A couple of years ago, I replied to a post on “What’s Up, Wellesley,” a popular Facebook group on which someone had remarked that school should be closed due to the bitter cold. Looking to appear tough and unconcerned, I scoffed at this suggestion in the comment section and wrote that we students rarely encountered the outside on our easy trek to school.

Nowadays, I more clearly see the concern, particularly when considering that not everyone comes to school the same way *I* do. It can be genuinely perilous, particularly for those in elementary schools. We New Englanders tend to be hardened to the cold, but that doesn’t excuse the hazard of recent weather. Fortunately, there were no weather-related injuries reported in February, but it’s not worth the risk.

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Temperature varied greatly over the two weeks in February. *(Screenshots courtesy of Christopher Bonis.)*