

Sometimes it gets cold in New England

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This just in. ... It's cold.

You gotta be kidding me. In January? In New England?

I'm not kidding. It's cold. It's on the front page. It's on the big-screen TV. It's breaking news. It's out front of the wars, the economy, the Middle East. That chill you feel is not emotional. It's atmospheric.

There are people out there talking about it. They're peeking out from their moving cocoon of scarves, hoods, knit caps and gloves and sharing the latest from the weather front.

"It's so cold you could ..."

Well, you know.

Bill Murphy, a member of The Journal's world-class photo staff, posted a brilliantly understated video on projo.com yesterday morning. It shows traffic moving at normal speeds on very clear roads as a voice recites a very long list of school closings.

Yup, the school doors were locked yesterday in a lot of places. The sun was out and you could count the snowflakes in the sky at the hour when the yellow buses would usually be hauling young minds to the classroom.

But they weren't hauling yesterday, not with winter being wintry.

Call it The Wimpifying of Southern New England. Murphy's video is the perfect statement -- calm and panic running side by side in the wintertime.

One can imagine a screeching school official, chasing a single snowflake across a parking lot while yelling, "Code Purple, Code Purple."

Or Code Red, White, Gray, Yellow or Pink -- whatever color designates that condition known as wussy weather meltdown.

It must be a hoot for people in those really cold places where life goes on in the high drifts and the kind of brittle temperatures that turn nose hairs to ice picks. They must look this way and think "sissies."

Maybe we're just caught in post-Dec. 13 paranoia.

Once, there was post-Blizzard of '78 paranoia, which meant a half-inch of snow would drive people to buy six months' worth of provisions and stock up on ice melt and batteries and bourbon.

Now, perhaps, the events of Dec. 13, 2007, are shaping the way we move! , or don 't move, when winter shows up.

On that day, of course, a not particularly unusual snowstorm shut down Rhode Island as officials failed miserably in preparing for it. And the enduring image from that day is the children stranded on school buses, in some cases until late into the evening. That image cost some good people their jobs. Somebody had to take the fall.

So now, apparently, officials are covering their backsides early. Low double digits on the thermometer and the possibility of snow halfway up the heel of a shoe are enough to set Operation Kid Cuddle into motion.

Close the schools. Don't take any chances. Make sure there aren't any of those embarrassing questions and embarrassing headlines.

It was all pretty silly yesterday. Some students can thank a bunch of kids stuck on buses 13 months ago for an unexpected day of video games and mall crawling.

But that was not the case at the very heart of weather alerts in Rhode Island.

"We think canceling school has serious implications for the continuity of education," said Michael Barnes, Foster-Glocester superintendent.

With no snow to create hazardous conditions, Barnes said it was left to parents to decide how to prepare their children for the trip to school.

So there was school on a cold day in Foster-Glocester yesterday. Not wimpy, not wussy, just sensible.