

EMERGENCY CLOSURE – REGULAR SCHOOL DAY

Background

The Superintendent may close schools and/or arrange for the early dismissal of students in situations where the health and safety of students is at risk.

The primary consideration in the event of severe weather conditions shall be the health and safety of students. The Superintendent may suspend or curtail school bus service to any school or schools and/or close schools or cancel classes when weather conditions constitute a hazard to the safety of students.

During inclement weather, the final decision to send a child to the bus stop or to school rests with the parents, even though buses and school may be operational. Parents are expected to exercise good judgement and care when deciding whether or not to send their child(ren) to school when weather conditions are extreme.

Area conditions shall dictate decision-making. Factors which threaten student health and safety are not always present in all communities at the same time. Thus, it is often necessary to close a group of schools in one region of the Division or even an individual school while others remain open. In weather related situations, it is even occasionally necessary to suspend operation of individual bus routes while the schools affected continue to operate.

Blizzards and drifted or icy roads are often the most difficult situations to assess. These conditions can vary greatly throughout the Division and can appear and disappear over short time spans. The Superintendent assesses these situations by consulting with public school transportation managers.

Procedures

1. School will be closed for students and staff if conditions are such that the students and staff are at a health risk. Any of the following factors, or combinations of them, shall serve as guides for considering school closure or early dismissal of students:
 - 1.1 Loss of power and heat;
 - 1.2 Inadequate water supply;
 - 1.3 Sewer back-up;
 - 1.4 Structural damage to the school building;
 - 1.5 Illness epidemic; and/or
 - 1.6 Other emergent situations.

2. Classes may be cancelled from time to time for inclement weather and such closure will be announced on the radio. An automated phone message will be sent out to affected individuals. The Division website will be updated with a scrolling message and a school alert notice on the home page will indicate a message beside the appropriate school. It is the parents' responsibility to look and listen for these announcements and to make suitable arrangements for their children.

3. Any of the following factors, or combinations of them, shall serve as guidelines for considering cancellation of classes or early dismissal of students:
 - 3.1 A temperature of -40 degrees Celsius or lower reported by the Weather Office for the area in question;
 - 3.2 Wind chill of approximately -50 degrees Celsius, as determined by the Public Weather Information Office in Edmonton or Red Deer;
 - 3.3 Visibility of less than 30 meters as determined by the Public Weather Information Office in Edmonton or Red Deer; and/or
 - 3.4 Advisory reports from police, municipal or other local road officials.

Where the police have made decisions regarding road travel, closure, etc., these shall prevail over any or all other regulations.

4. Early morning decisions regarding bus service cancellation or cancellation of classes will be made prior to 6:30 a.m.
 - 4.1 After consulting with appropriate personnel, the Superintendent or designate will decide whether Division operated buses will run.
5. In the event of an emergency school closure or early dismissal:
 - 5.1 The principal will:
 - 5.1.1 Consult with the Superintendent;
 - 5.1.2 Notify school personnel and other appropriate people of the decision to close the school or arrange for the early dismissal of students;
 - 5.1.3 In extreme emergency situations, exercise good judgement and decide and act on his/her own; and
 - 5.1.4 Initiate Synrevoice to ensure proper information is given regarding school closure.
 - 5.2 The Superintendent will:
 - 5.2.1 Arrange for the school bus drivers to be notified immediately; and
 - 5.2.2 Initiate the spread of information to the school community via the Synrevoice call-out system; the STAR website scroll bar and school alerts notice; a listing of television and radio stations on the [STAR website](#).
6. Parents are not required to send their children to school if, in their judgement, weather conditions are detrimental to the safety or well being of their children.
7. If classes are cancelled during inclement weather:
 - 7.1 The principal shall ensure that one or more staff members are designated to open the school doors in the event that students do arrive when classes are cancelled. The school must be accessible for a reasonable period of time;
 - 7.2 The school building shall remain open so that any students whose parents cannot be contacted and who have no alternative place to go can remain there under adult supervision, as arranged by the principal, until accommodations can be found;

- 7.3 If buses are sent home early but the school remains operational, the principal may allow a staff member who is likely to experience major difficulty in reaching home to leave school early.
8. Traditionally, the suspension of rural transportation and the severe weather causing the suspension have tended to dramatically reduce the urban student attendance on those days. In the event of inclement weather causing the cancellation of the transportation services for some students, the following procedures will apply:
 - 8.1 Staff shall be on duty if the school is open.
 - 8.2 Unless otherwise directed by the principal, teachers shall be responsible for the direct supervision and instruction of their assigned classes for students not affected by the cancellation of transportation services.
 - 8.3 Teachers shall exercise their professional judgement in making the decision to present new material or to undertake supplementary activities when transportation services to the school are cancelled. If new material is presented, teachers shall make provision for students to attain the objectives of the material missed during their absence.
 - 8.4 Principals are to exercise their own judgement in respect of the application of attendance policies in their schools.
9. In the event of early dismissal of bussed students, every student shall be delivered safely to their parents/guardians or are satisfactorily housed.
10. When conditions are such that it is not safe to send students home by bus, they are to be kept at school until satisfactory arrangements can be made.
11. At the commencement of the term, principals shall communicate in writing the following information to parents:
 - 11.1 The current policies on Emergency Cancellation or Closing and Inclement Weather;
 - 11.2 Advice to the parents that their children are to be dressed warmly in severe weather;
 - 11.3 Advice to the parents that they make alternate arrangements for accommodating their children in the event school is closed; classes are cancelled or dismissed early when parents are away.
12. Staff are required to make a reasonable effort to travel to school, if classes are cancelled due to inclement weather or impassable road conditions.
13. If weather and road conditions place the welfare of staff in some jeopardy in reaching their usual place of residence, the principal may authorize a staff member to leave prior to normal school closing time. The principal must ensure appropriate supervision is maintained.

Reference: Section 57, 60, 61, 113, School Act
Employment Standards Act