

## SEVERE WEATHER CONDITIONS AND THE SCHOOL CLOSURE PROCESS

It is our sincere desire in Wolf Creek Public Schools to ensure that our educational community understands the process by which we analyze “severe weather” and determine if our buses, and therefore our schools, should operate. We hope that the following information fulfills that expectation, but if you feel that you need further clarity around any aspect of this process please feel free to contact the school that your student attends or the central office of the school division.

To make this letter as user friendly as possible we will use a question and answer format to discuss the different stages to our weather analysis process, and then outline the decision making steps that could occur on a severe weather day.

### **1. What kind of weather conditions could force parts or all of our bussing system, and therefore our schools, to shut down?**

Our administrative procedure 131(Closure of Schools due to Inclement Weather) lays out the weather conditions that warrant a close investigation by our staff and could ultimately lead to a school and/or bus shutdown. In a nutshell they are: extreme cold that has an air temperature in excess of - 40 degrees Celsius, a wind chill that creates a temperature in excess of – 40 degrees Celsius, dangerous road conditions and/or poor visibility. (Examples would be fog, heavy snowfall, blowing snow, freezing rain etc)

### **2. What is the decision making process that leads to our bussing system shutting down?**

On those days when we know that a decision on school closure/bus system shutdown could be forthcoming our transportation manager goes through a number of steps:

- a. Weather stations are monitored at approximately 4:30 am to determine the predictions for our area. This is only preliminary information and does not impact our decisions locally.
- b. The transportation manager, along with a minimum of 8 of our bus drivers from different parts of the school division are on the road at approximately 5am to 6 am determining the local conditions. Their information can allow us to shut down different parts of the school division, or different school bus runs, without closing all of our schools. However, in some circumstances their information can cause us to close all of our school bus runs, and schools, for the day.
- c. All drivers are on two way radios so the information is collated quickly and given to the transportation manager.
- d. If the conditions are determined to warrant a complete or partial shut down of schools and/or bussing system, the transportation manager contacts the Superintendent of Schools at approximately 6am. The

decision is made this early in the morning due to the timeframes that bus drivers use; many start their runs shortly after 6am. As soon as the decision to cancel runs or school operation is made we begin a process of contacting our staff and the media with respect to our decision.

- e. It is also important to recognize that our jurisdiction schedules additional time into the minimum number of hours recommended by Alberta Education, so missing some time due to inclement weather does not necessarily mean our students are losing out on their educational programming.

### **3. What are the options for the superintendent with respect to school/bus shutdown?**

The superintendent has various options at his disposal, but he bases these on the information that is available at that time of the morning. This is important to consider because weather patterns can look very different at various times of the day, and decisions must be understood in that context.

Essentially the superintendent has the flexibility to close all schools, or a few heavily impacted schools for the day, but in either case the decision automatically closes the bussing system down as well. He can also decide to close bussing for the morning for a few, or all schools, but provide it in the afternoon. In this scenario the school remains open for students who don't necessarily need bussing transportation but also allows students who do get to the school to have transportation later in the day.

### **4. How is the information conveyed to all stakeholders?**

As soon as the superintendent, in consultation with the transportation manager, decides on an appropriate response to the weather conditions of the day a fan out/media contact process begins in the following manner:

- a. The transportation manager contacts all media outlets that would normally be listened to by our audience. (Big 105.5 FM and CKGY 95.5 FM/ ZED 98.9 FM in Red Deer; CHED 630AM and CFCW 790AM in Edmonton; and KJR 1440 in Wetaskiwin; and SUNNY 94.1 in Lacombe; ITV Global in Edmonton) This places a responsibility on the family to ascertain this information through the media outlets and act accordingly. Please note, that the family always has ultimate authority and responsibility to decide if their child should ride on our transportation system on these types of days.
- b. The superintendent then commences a fan out communication to all administrators in the school division to alert their staff to the fact that

schools and/or bus runs will be cancelled. While staff is expected to make every reasonable effort to be at the school, we also recognize that they may need to wait for a period of time until the weather conditions improve, or roads allow safe passage.

**5. Do bus drivers have authority to decide if their bus will run or not, or to decide if they will stop at a particular pick up site?**

Absolutely. Our bus drivers know their route and the conditions that they are facing better than anyone else. If they decide to cancel their route for the day then we ask them to advise our dispatch office so that they can assist the driver in letting all parents on that route know of the decision. That allows the parents to arrange for daycare or some type of arrangement to care for their children if that is needed.

If bus drivers decide not to stop at a particular site due to weather conditions then they go through the same process of contacting our dispatch office and we phone the parents to let them know why the bus didn't stop at their pick-up site.

The key message for parents is that they **must be prepared** for the possibility that a bus may not stop at their pickup site. In such circumstances the parents retain responsibility for their children and must not assume the school division will make alternative arrangements for transportation to the school site.