

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS REGARDING INCLEMENT WEATHER

1. Who decides if the buses will run?

Each bus driver decides for his/her route and/or the bus company decides in consultation with drivers. The decision is based on a risk assessment. The driver or company is responsible to notify the Director of Transportation services, the school principals affected by the route closure, and all affected families on the route.

2. If one bus doesn't run, are all buses cancelled?

No. The decision is route - by - route. The Division is over 3000 square miles and conditions vary throughout. Usually the buses in a general area are all affected. For example, if there is a storm in Three Hills those buses may not run while the buses in Strathmore area may run.

3. What conditions result in a bus route closure for the day?

If the conditions appear to pose a significant risk to students, then the route will be cancelled. Risks include conditions like fog, snow-blocked roads, extreme cold, icy conditions, and impassable roads due to wash-outs. In Alberta winter driving conditions occur from September - May so the buses are equipped for normal winter driving. Cancellations occur only in extreme circumstances. Often the first inclement weather of the season causes the most difficulty.

4. How many times do bus route closures occur?

This depends entirely on weather conditions. Based on past experience, on average, a bus route might close 2-3 times per year.

5. Are schools open when buses aren't running?

Yes. Schools are open to receive children who are able to get to school. Remember that one or two route closures may impact only a few students. Many times a bus route or two is closed but school carries on in the normal way because the vast majority of students are able to attend.

6. When and why are schools closed due to bad weather?

Schools are closed only when it is apparent that all or nearly all the buses can't run. If the buses can't run, then our staff usually can't make the drive to work either. If there are too few students and/or too few teachers to make school a safe and worthwhile instructional experience, the school will be closed. The principal, in consultation with the superintendent, decides when a school will close. School closures could occur for more reasons than inclement weather, but that is the usual reason. School closures are generally rare events - once or twice a year at most and some years not at all.

7. If the school is officially closed, will someone be in the building to receive students who may not know about the closure?

Yes. Someone, usually the principal, will be in the school at the regular time to open doors and ensure that children have a safe, supervised place to stay until their parents or another caregiver can arrive and take them from the school.

8. How will I know if the bus route is cancelled or the school is closed?

If your bus driver calls to inform you, or you receive a call from another parent who is part of a "fan out" for phone calls, you will know that the bus is not running. Route closures are also announced on several local radio stations. If the school is closed, buses won't be running. Announcements about school closures are also on the local radio stations.

9. Why don't the schools close every time the bus routes are cancelled?

Because bus route closures may not affect even the majority of the students and because parents count on schools to provide child care services, the schools don't automatically close because of bus route closures. The school closes only when the route closures are pervasive and staff, too, cannot safely drive to work.

10. If the school is open but the bus isn't running, should I drive my child to school?

Use your best judgment. If you live a short distance from town, believe your vehicle is well equipped to handle road conditions that buses cannot safely drive, and you are confident that you can pick up your child if conditions worsen or at the end of the day, you may choose to transport your child. If you choose not to drive, that will also be supported. You are the parent so you can decide what risks you wish to take.

11. What if the school is open, the buses aren't running, and I feel compelled to have my child at school?

Please don't take unnecessary risks. If your child attends school regularly, then missing a day or two over the course of the year, due to travel conditions will not affect his/her achievement. Missed assignments due to weather can be rescheduled to accommodate your child.

12. How soon will I know about bus route closures or a school closure?

The people who make the decisions about route closures consult as early as 6:00 a.m. Sometimes the conditions are forecast to improve so the decision may not be finalized until closer to 6:30 or 6:45. If the decision is made to close your route, you will receive a phone call from the driver or a parent who participates in the fan out. If the decision is made to close all bus routes you may not receive a personal call, rather you will hear a public service announcement on several radio stations. If the school is closed, you will hear a public service announcement. It is a good idea to keep the radio on in the mornings when you suspect that a route closure or school closure could occur. If travel advisories have been issued, or the conditions for travel appear dangerous, there is potential for a closure of a route and/or a school. The Division serves over 6000 students so we rely, too, on the efforts of parents to keep themselves reasonably informed by listening to the radio. The Division does not have

the people-power to call 6000 students before 8:00 a.m. so your efforts to listen for announcements is much appreciated.

13. Why should I send my child to school when some bus routes are cancelled, because many students are away, and the class seems to be a waste of time? Do kids spend all day watching movies and playing games?

No. The truth is that under very rare circumstances do kids watch movies. The video materials available for school use are almost exclusively chosen because they support outcomes in the Program of Studies, so a video watching at school is not like video watching at home. It is not entertainment. If you have concerns about the appropriateness or inappropriateness of activities on inclement weather days, please don't hesitate to raise these concerns with your school administrator.

On "snow days," students have a rare opportunity to work one-on-one with their teachers to review, work on essays and other projects, and / or study in preparation for exams. Students can engage in interesting conversations with staff and other students and the small group environment is often more conducive to hearing from students who are reluctant to speak in large groups. Snow days are great days to have your kids at school!

14. Most of the bus information applies to bus routes for students who live out of town. What about students who live in town?

Bus drivers in town can often drive their routes when closures are necessary for out-of-town routes. If the town buses won't be running, you will hear an announcement on the radio. Town buses usually run in all weather conditions UNLESS the school is closed. If the school is closed, please do not send or transport your child to the school. If you are unaware of the closure, please remember that staff will be at school to ensure your child's safety. Please do not expect a personal phone call. Thank you for listening to the local radio stations whenever you suspect a school closure or bus route closure due to weather conditions.

15. If a bus route is cancelled in the morning, will the bus run at the end of the school day to take students home who were able to find other transportation to school?

No. If a bus route is cancelled in the morning due to weather or school closure the route is cancelled for both pick up and drop off or return service.