

Policy Manual – Administration

A.03 Inclement Weather and Emergency School Closings PROCEDURES

Once a decision has been made to close a school(s) and child care centre(s) due to inclement weather or other emergency conditions the following procedures are to be implemented:

A. Inclement Weather Procedures and Emergency School Closings Before the School Day Commences

1. The Director of Education or designate, in consultation with the General Manager of The Hamilton-Wentworth Student Transportation Services (HWSTS), shall communicate the decision to the Chairperson of the Board and other appropriate staff to either: a) cancel Board provided transportation and keep schools open; or
b) cancel transportation and close schools.
2. In the case when a single school (or group of schools) are closed before the school day commences (e.g., inclement weather, utility outages (i.e., electrical, water, natural gas) that are expected to last longer than two hours and create a situation that is unhealthy/unsafe for students and staff) the decision to close a school(s) will be made by the principal in consultation with the Superintendent of Education and communicated to the Chairperson of the Board and Director of Education;
3. The decision shall be communicated by 6:30 a.m., when feasible, so that students, parents and Board personnel may be informed in sufficient time.
4. The General Manager of the HWSTS shall communicate the decision to cancel transportation of students and/or the closure of a school(s) to:
 - a) Bus contractor(s);
 - b) Taxi operators; and
 - c) School Crossing Guards (Police).
5. a) The Media & Communications Manager shall inform all radio stations and other media of bus cancellations or school closures. Information shall be posted on the Board and school websites and communicated through social media;

Parents/guardians will be informed in the event of a school(s) closure before the school day commences, that one of the following situations has occurred:

- i) *All schools and child care centres are closed today, [date], as a result of inclement weather;*
- ii) *As a result of inclement weather, all transportation is cancelled, but schools and child care centres remain open today, [date];*
- iii) *In the case of a single school closure:
[School Name] will be closed today, [date], as a result of [identified reason].*

6. a) If it is decided to keep schools open but to cancel transportation, all staff will be expected to make every effort to report to their work locations;
- b) In the event that it is decided to close a school(s) and to cancel transportation,
 - i. schools should establish a contingency to provide for the care and safety of any student who may have missed the announcement of closure. It is however, recognized that when all schools/child care sites in the Board have been closed prior to the start of the school day as a result of severe weather, it will not always be possible for the principal (or designate) to attend at the school site as travel would be deemed too hazardous.
 - ii. The Director of Education, superintendents of education, principals/viceprincipals, supervisors, managers shall remain available for contact.

B. Inclement Weather Procedures and Emergency School Closings After the School Day has Commenced

1. If all schools/child care centres are closing after the school day has commenced, the Director of Education (designate) shall communicate the decision to the Chairperson of the Board, the General Manager of the HWSTS, the Media & Communications Manager and to the Superintendents of Education that schools will close early;
2. In the case when a single (or group of schools/child care centres) are closing (e.g., utility outages (i.e., electrical, water, natural gas)) the principal, in consultation with the Superintendent of Education should commence a decision to close the school;
3. The Superintendent of Education shall communicate the decision to close a school(s)/child care centre(s) in a timely manner to the Chairperson of the Board, the appropriate trustee, the Director of Education and other staff as required;
4. Principals/vice-principals will inform the related child care/before-and-after program and initiate the school call-out program to contact parents/guardians;
5. The General Manager of the HWSTS shall communicate the decision to close a school(s) early to bus contractor(s); taxi operators; etc.;
6. The Media & Communications Manager shall inform all radio stations, other media and school crossing guards of bus cancellations or school closures. Information shall be posted on the Board and school websites and communicated through social media. This information will also be sent by the school principal (or designate) via School Messenger (email/robocall);
7. It shall be the responsibility of the principal to ensure that all students who are in school are supervised until the parents/guardians arrive to pick up the student(s)
Note: If a school(s) is closed as a result of a utility outage, and there is no immediate threat to safety, students who are still at the school at regular dismissal time may be dismissed as normal and do not have to wait for parents/guardians for pick-up;
8. The staff shall remain at their work locations until their principal/supervisor redirects them to an alternate site or authorizes them to work from home.

Role of Transportation Department

- a) It shall be the responsibility of the General Manager of the HWSTS to monitor weather conditions in order to ensure the safe transportation of students;
- b) When weather warnings are announced, the General Manager & the HWSTS shall contact one or more of the following agencies to obtain specific information about the weather warnings and the areas affected:
 - i) The Hamilton Weather Office
 - ii) The Hamilton Police Services
 - iii) Ontario Provincial Police
 - iv) Other school boards in the area
 - v) School bus contractor(s) serving the Board
 - vi) Assign weather “spotters” to provide real-time feedback regarding road conditions
- c) If, in the opinion of the General Manager of HWSTS, the weather conditions could endanger the safe transportation of students, the General Manager shall make recommendations to the Director of Education with respect to the cancellation of transportation in an area affected or throughout the entire region due to inclement weather.

Role of the Director of Education

1. It shall be the responsibility of the Director of Education, after consulting with the HWSTS and the Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board (HWDSB), to either:
 - a) cancel transportation and keep schools open; or
 - b) cancel transportation and close schools.
2. When the decision is announced, staff shall implement either:
 - a) Inclement Weather Procedures Before the School Day commences; or,
 - b) Inclement Weather Procedures After the School Day commences.

Role of Parents

1. In the event of impending severe weather conditions, parents should consider the safety of their children in deciding whether to send them to school;
2. Parents should stay tuned to local media and follow HWCDSB webpages/social media for weather reports and school board announcements. If schools are closed before the school day commences parents will be informed in a timely manner and will not bring students to the school site;
3. Parents who, in spite of bus cancellations, drive their children to school, will be required to make the necessary arrangements for the safe return home of their children at dismissal as buses which do not run in the morning will not run for the rest of the day;
4. Phone calls to the school during severe weather conditions are to be made only in the case of an extreme emergency;
5. Parents shall be requested to provide the school with the name and telephone number of a neighbour/alternate, (i.e., someone who lives near the home) who, during a school

closure after the school day commences, would be willing to act on their behalf to pick up the student in the event that they cannot be reached.

Role of Principal

1. The Principal shall in-service staff on the requirements of the Board's Inclement Weather and Emergency School Closings Policy, clarify the roles of teachers/staff in the event of inclement weather, or other conditions, and identify options and expectations.
2. Early or Delayed Dismissal
 - a) In the case of an early dismissal, all parents (or their alternate) of Kindergarten-Grade 8 students must be notified prior to the dismissal of the children;
In cases of a prolonged delayed dismissal, all parents (or their alternate) of the children involved, must be notified of the delay;
Should such a delay require a public announcement, the principal shall contact the Board's Media & Communications Manager for this purpose;
 - b) An up-to-date list of family telephone numbers and alternate phone numbers are to be compiled for such emergencies;
 - c) Older children may assist younger children under severe weather conditions;
 - d) Principals are encouraged to notify parents that, under severe weather conditions, they should meet their children at school or at their bus stop;
 - e) In the event of a delayed dismissal, it is the responsibility of the principal to provide adequate supervision. It is at the discretion of the principal to decide what constitutes adequate supervision and to assign teachers for this purpose;

Principal's Designate

1. In choosing a designate, the following **may** be considered:
 - a) Vice-Principal (where applicable);
 - b) Assistant to Principal (Elementary);
 - c) Principal Intern (Elementary);
 - d) Teacher-in-charge/secondary leadership candidate;
 - e) Member of the school staff;
 - f) Staff member employed by the Board; or,
 - g) Consult with Superintendent for alternate arrangements.

Role of Child Care Centres

Child-care staff and school personnel will work together to meet the needs of families and ensure the safety of all children.

1. If the school closes, the child-care centre located in that school will also close;
2. If transportation is cancelled and the school remains open, the centre will be open to receive children whose parents chose to accept responsibility for transporting children to

and from the centre. Parents shall be made aware that in the event of closure they or their alternate must be available to ensure the child's return home;

3. The school principal and child care supervisor shall co-ordinate the notification of parents (or their alternate) regarding an emergency situation. To avoid duplication, the child-care staff will assume responsibility for contacting all families whose children attend the centre. These families would then be taken off the list for school. After the centre staff has contacted all their assigned families, the telephone line in the centre could be made available to school personnel for their additional calls.