Waterloo Region District School Board

Administrative Procedure 4130

SEVERE WEATHER CONDITIONS (BUS CANCELLATION - STUDENT DISMISSAL - SCHOOL CLOSING)

Responsibility:	*Coordinating Superintendent, Business Services & Treasurer of the Board* *Superintendent, Student Achievement & Well-Being*
Legal References:	*Education Act S. 19 (b)*
Related References:	*AP 3000 - WRDSB Emergency Procedure* *AP 4260 - Student Transportation* *BP 4014 - Extreme Temperatures*
Revisions:	*November 2013, July 2014, November 2014, October 2015, November 2019*
Reviewed:	*December 2020*

1. Preamble

1.1 The procedures that follow provide guidelines and expectations for bus cancellations, student dismissal, and school closings due to severe weather conditions, including communicating to WRDSB staff and schools, parents, community partners and the public, the media, bus operators and taxi companies. It also outlines the contingency plans for school closure, student dismissal and cancellation of transportation due to severe weather conditions, and guidelines for responding to resulting absences. The Board will make every attempt to keep schools open unless conditions are too severe and put the safety and security of students at risk.

2. Definition

2.1 Severe weather conditions refer to conditions such as ice, fog, rain, sleet, snow, wind and/or frigid temperatures and wind chills which are considered serious enough to raise concerns regarding the safety of pupils traveling to and/or from school.

2.2 Frigid Temperatures are considered those where the temperature is –35°C or colder with wind-chill. The General Manager of Student Transportation Services of Waterloo Region (STSWR), will assess the temperatures in Waterloo Region using Environment Canada's wind-chill index by 5:30 am. If the temperature is forecasted to reach –35°C or colder with wind-chill at 7:00 am, he/she will inform the Director or designate. In this situation buses will not operate. Schools may be open dependent on weather conditions. In the interest of student safety, staff is to communicate to parents that frigid temperatures present a risk of frostbite within minutes of skin being exposed and they should ensure their children are properly dressed for frigid temperatures and that they take into consideration that there may not be crossing guard service as a result of the frigid temperatures.

2.3 Principal Designate – where the Principal assigns a designate he or she is responsible for ensuring that his/her designate is aware of Severe Weather Procedures and the plan that is in place at the school should severe weather become an issue.

3. School Closing/Bus Cancellation

3.1 Sometimes weather conditions will require the cancellation of selected buses and/or closure of selected sites and programs either before school opens or after the start of the school day.

Parents have the option of keeping their children at home or picking them up before the regular dismissal time when concerned about severe weather conditions.

3.2 Before School Opens

3.2.1 The process for determining bus cancellations and/or school closures due to severe weather before school opens is as follows:

3.2.2 A recommendation to cancel all student transportation and/or to close all schools will be discussed with the Director of Education or designate(s). Every attempt will be made to make this decision before 6:00 a.m.

3.2.3 The General Manager of STSWR initiates communication to Board staff via email or other appropriate means. The General Manager of STSWR contacts the bus and taxi operators and the media via email or other appropriate means such as websites. Staff, parents and students are directed to the WRDSB website, WRDSB social media feed, school websites, and local media.

3.2.4 This process also applies for an "area" bus cancellation, such as in Wellesley, Wilmot, Woolwich or North Dumfries Townships

3.2.5 All school closures will be announced to the media via the Communications Officer and/or the General Manager of STSWR. Where a school is closed the before and after school program in that school will also be closed. This applies to board operated and third party operated programs.

3.2.6 Cancellation of transportation does not automatically mean that schools are closed. Before a decision is made, the General Manager of Student Transportation Services of Waterloo Region, assesses road conditions and a decision is made in consultation with the Director of Education or designate and the Director of Education or designate of the Waterloo Catholic District School Board.

3.2.7 If transportation is cancelled, and schools remain open, parents will need to decide whether they are able to transport their child/children to and from school that day. School staff will be available at the school to receive children. Parents make the final decision as to whether or not conditions are safe to send their child to school.

3.2.8 If schools are closed, school staff will <u>not</u> be available to receive children.

3.3 After the Start of the School Day

3.3.1 After the start of the school day, every effort will be made to send students home at their normal dismissal time. If there are deteriorating weather conditions, a storm warning being put into effect, or a traffic advisory being issued after the start of the school day, a decision may be made by 1:00 p.m. to send bus students home early.

3.3.2 The Principal or designate(s) will remain in the school to receive confirmation that buses have been able to deliver students, to supervise stranded students, to answer telephone calls, and to be reasonably assured that all students have had an opportunity to arrive home safely. The Custodian will also remain in the school to ensure the security of the building until all students have left the building. After school program DECEs will not be left alone in the building with students.

3.3.3 STSWR in conjunction with the Director of Education or designate, the Director of Education or designate of the Waterloo Catholic District School Board, Bus Operators, the Ministry of Transportation and Waterloo Regional Police will make the decision. A minimum of 60 minutes will be needed to activate transportation arrangements.

3.3.4 The Director or designate informs Coordinating Council, the Student Achievement and Well-Being Team and the Superintendent, Student Achievement & Well-Being, who then leads the system communication plan.

3.3.5 STSWR notifies the Bus Operators, taxi companies and the media.

3.3.6 The Superintendents, Student Achievement & Well-Being communicate information to all departments and/or schools affected via the following process:

3.3.6.1 Administrative Assistants to the Superintendents, Student Achievement & Well-Being will communicate the information to departments and/or schools by email and phone making use of their Departmental and/or Family of Schools Fan-out. The Principal or designate will make sure the message is communicated to all staff in the school. If the Principal is absent from the school, the Principal designate would be responsible for ensuring

communication to all staff in the school. Departmental and School contacts at the end of the fan-out are to complete the cycle as indicated on their area fan-out by calling the Administrative Assistant to their appropriate Superintendent, Student Achievement & Well-Being. The Principal or designate activates the bus cancellation/student dismissal plan as referenced in Sections 5 and 6 of this Procedure.

3.3.7 In the case of an "area" bus cancellation, such as in Wellesley Wilmot and Woolwich Townships or North Dumfries, the same process must be followed.

3.3.8 When a decision to cancel buses is made after school has started in the morning, walking students are sent home at their normal dismissal times.

4. Communication to WRDSB Staff

4.1 Before School Starts

4.1.1 The primary means of communication to WRDSB staff regarding bus cancellations or school closure, as a result of severe weather, is the WRDSB website. Staff, community partners and parents are directed to reference the WRDSB website whenever severe weather is forecasted.

4.1.2 As a secondary measure, staff, partners and parents may also wish to access information via their respective school websites, WRDSB's social media feed and local media for the latest updates on bus cancellations and school closures.

4.1.3 Every effort will be made to ensure that communication on weather-related closure is sent to all Principals or designate(s), Senior Administration, by the General Manager of STSWR via email and text message prior to 6:00 a.m. unless there are extenuating circumstances that prevent adherence to this time frame. As such, it is critical that all Principals, Vice Principals and Senior Administration provide their direct supervisor with their cellular number.

4.1.4 The Communications Officer or designate will post the appropriate message to the WRDSB website, to WRDSB's social media feed, and to school websites upon communication from the Director or designate.

4.1.5 In an atypical situation, or in the event of a web or server failure or where the Board website and/or school websites may not be accessible, Senior Administration and Principals are directed to communicate with their staff using their Departmental and/or Family of Schools Emergency Fan-out.

4.2 After School Starts

4.2.1 After the start of school, the Administrative Assistants to the Superintendents, Student Achievement & Well-Being, will communicate the information to departments and/or schools by email and by phone, making use of Departmental and/or Family of Schools Fan-outs. The Principal or designate will make sure the message is communicated to all staff in the school. Departmental and/or School contacts at the end of the fan-out are to complete the cycle as indicated on their area fan-out by calling the Administrative Assistant to their appropriate Superintendent, Student Achievement & Well-Being.

5. Communication to Parents, Students, Media, Bus Operators and Taxi Companies

5.1 Student Transportation Services of Waterloo Region (STSWR) will be responsible for communicating all decisions with respect to severe weather to the media, school bus operators, transit authorities and taxi companies.

5.2 In early fall, and as new students enroll, the Principal shall inform parents about bus cancellation/student dismissal/school closing and severe weather contingency procedures. Regular information items about the contingency plan in the school newsletter and on the school website during the winter months will help keep parents prepared for this situation. The information will advise parents to refer to the WRDSB website, the WRDSB social media feed, school websites, and/or listen to the following radio stations for bus cancellation and school closure information:

KOOL-FM	**FM 105.3**	**CKWR Kitchener**	**FM 98.5**
MAGIC FM	**FM 106.1**	**CHYM Kitchener**	**FM 96.7**
570 News	**AM 570**	**Dave FM**	**FM 107.5**
Oldies 1090	**AM 1090**	**Kicx**	**FM 106.7**
Faith FM	**FM 94.3**	**The Beat**	**FM 91.5**
CTV Kitchener is also contacted	**CBC Radio**	**FM 89.1**	

5.3 In the interest of student safety, staff is to communicate to parents that frigid temperatures present a risk of frostbite within minutes of skin being exposed and they should ensure their children are properly dressed for frigid temperatures and that they take into consideration that there may not be crossing guard service as a result of the frigid temperatures. Staff should remind parents that they have the option of keeping their children at home or picking them up before the regular dismissal time when concerned about weather conditions.

6. Contingency Plans for School Closure, Student Dismissal and Cancellation of Transportation

6.1 It is the duty of the Principal to ensure emergency contact information is maintained for all students. Principals should communicate pertinent severe weather procedures to their parent community via school website and school newsletter in advance of and throughout the severe weather season. Parents should be reminded that they have the option of keeping their children at home or picking them up before the regular dismissal time when concerned about weather conditions.

6.2 The dismissal of students that walk to school will occur at the regularly scheduled dismissal time. Parents have the option of keeping their children at home or picking them up before the regular dismissal time when concerned about weather conditions.

6.3 The Principal, or designate, will remain in the school to receive confirmation that buses have been able to deliver students, to supervise stranded students, to answer telephone calls, and to ensure the security of the building until reasonably assured that all students have had an opportunity to arrive home safely. DECEs will not be left alone in the after school program with remaining students.

6.4 It is the responsibility of parents to arrange alternative accommodation for their child if the child cannot go home during an unscheduled school closing. The parent is expected to clearly explain the alternative to the child and to inform the school, in writing, what the alternative arrangement would be. It is recommended that this information be reviewed and verified with parents and students, especially during the severe weather months.

7. Off-Campus Trips

7.1 All off-campus trips will be cancelled when buses for day school students are not operating due to severe weather conditions. If road/weather conditions improve during the day and the bus operator is satisfied that safety is not compromised, the school and the operator, in consultation with the Senior Superintendent, Student Achievement & Well-Being, may elect to proceed with a previously scheduled excursion.

7.2 The school bus operator has the ultimate responsibility to determine if road conditions are safe, and may alter a route, return to a school/start of route, or point of pick-up, based on this decision. In any of these circumstances, the bus operator shall notify the Principal(s) and STSWR. The Principal(s) or designate will notify the parents.

8. Afternoon Transportation

8.1 Afternoon transportation will not be provided if bus transportation has been cancelled in the morning because of severe weather conditions. Parents who find other means to take their children to school when morning bus transportation has been cancelled are expected to arrange their children's return home.

9. Absences

9.1 Student Absence

Children may be excused from school if severe weather is such that parents consider their children's safety to be endangered. Parents may also come to school to pick-up their child before regular dismissal time. Students who remain at home due to severe weather are to have their absence noted/changed to a "G Day" on the student register, after confirmation by parents.

9.2 Staff Absence

9.2.1 Where the Board closes a school due to severe weather, all teachers, educational assistants, designated early childhood educators, administrators, office/clerical staff, library clerks, custodians and tradespersons assigned to working the school day at that school will be assigned to work from home.

9.2.2 On those days when schools are open and buses are cancelled, employees are expected to report to their school.

9.2.2.1 EXCEPTION: During the 2020/2021 school year or until the COVID-19 pandemic is over, employees are not expected to report to their school as schools will be closed when buses are cancelled.

9.2.3 Unless otherwise communicated (see 10.2 below), the Education Centre will remain open and employees working from the Education Centre are expected to report to work.

9.2.3.1 EXCEPTION: During the 2020/2021 school year or until the COVID-19 pandemic is over, employees are not expected to report to the Education Centre when schools are closed and buses are cancelled.

9.2.4 Employees who work an afternoon shift at a school (i.e. a shift that extends beyond the end of the school day) will be informed whether the school will be open during their shift. Afternoon staff may be assigned to work from home if weather is extreme in the afternoon. Normally, this communication will occur by 1:00 p.m. via the approved Board communication tools (i.e. Board website, WRDSB social media feed).

9.2.5 In all circumstances, staff is expected to make every reasonable effort to report to work unless otherwise specified above. Procedures for staff absences by reason of severe weather may be referenced in the employee's respective Collective Agreement.

10. Media Announcements

10.1 Sometimes weather conditions will require the cancellation of selected buses and/or closure of selected sites and programs either before school opens or after the start of the school day. This process also applies for an "area" bus cancellation, such as in Wellesley, Wilmot, Woolwich or North Dumfries Townships.

10.2 Media Announcements Before School Opens

Situation 1 (A.1)

- Due to the current weather conditions, ALL SCHOOL BUSES, TAXIS AND SPECIAL EDUCATION ROUTES operated by the Waterloo Region District School Board are cancelled. All public schools are open
- All Before and After School programs and Child Care Centres Co-located in schools are OPEN.
- Education Centre is OPEN.

Situation 2 (A.2)

- Due to the current weather conditions, ALL SCHOOL BUSES, TAXIS AND SPECIAL EDUCATION ROUTES in Wellesley, Wilmot and Woolwich Townships are cancelled for the Waterloo Region District School Board. All public schools are open.
- TRANSPORTATION IN ALL OTHER AREAS IS OPERATING.
- All Before and After School programs and Child Care Centres Co-located in schoolsExtended Day Child Care Programs are OPEN.
- Education Centre is OPEN.

Situation 3 (A.3)

- Due to the current weather conditions ALL SCHOOL BUSES, TAXIS AND SPECIAL EDUCATION ROUTES in Wellesley, Wilmot, Woolwich and North Dumfries Townships are cancelled for the Waterloo Region District School Board. All public schools are open.
- TRANSPORTATION IN ALL OTHER AREAS IS OPERATING.
- All Before and After School programs and Child Care Centres Co-located in schools are OPEN.
- Education Centre is OPEN.

Situation 4 (A.4)

- Due to the current weather conditions ALL SCHOOL BUSES, TAXIS AND SPECIAL EDUCATION ROUTES operated by the Waterloo Region District School Board are cancelled
- All WRDSB schools and sites are CLOSED
- All evening rental permits are cancelled
- All Before and After School programs and Child Care Centres Co-located in schools are CLOSED.

Situation 5 (A.5)

- Due to the current frigid temperatures ALL SCHOOL BUSES, TAXIS AND SPECIAL EDUCATION ROUTES operated by the Waterloo Region District School Board and the Waterloo Catholic District School Board, are CANCELLED
- ALL SCHOOLS ARE OPEN and all Before and After School programs and Child Care Centres Co-located in schools are OPEN to those students who can safely arrive to school under the supervision and/or direction of their parents.
- Education Centre is OPEN.
- **In the interest of student safety,** parents are reminded that today's frigid temperatures present a risk of frostbite to exposed skin and they must ensure their children are properly dressed for today's frigid temperatures.
- Parents must also take into consideration that there may not be crossing guard service as a result of the frigid temperatures.

COVID Response

- Weather Impacted Distance Learning Day
- Due to the current weather conditions ALL SCHOOL BUSES, TAXIS AND SPECIAL EDUCATION ROUTES operated by the Waterloo Region District School Board are cancelled
- The WRDSB has designated today a Weather Impacted Distance Learning Day
- All WRDSB schools and sites are CLOSED
- Students should visit their respective virtual classrooms or WRDSB Learning @ Home for resources
- All Before and After School programs and Child Care Centres Co-located in schools are CLOSED

10.3 Media Announcements After the Start of the School Day

Situation 1 (C.1)

- Due to the deteriorating weather conditions, all school buses, taxis and special education routes operated by the Waterloo Region District School Board will be transporting students home from their schools (to be announced) hours earlier. Students who walk to school will be sent home at their normal dismissal times; however, parents are encouraged to pick-up their children as soon as possible. All WRDSB operated Extended Day programs will be CLOSED.
- The media will read the appropriate area and/or list of schools as advised by STSWR.

Situation 2 (C.2)

- Due to the deteriorating weather conditions, school buses, taxis and special education routes operated by the Waterloo Region District School Board will be transporting students home from the following schools, four (4) hours earlier. Students who walk to school will be sent home at their normal dismissal times; however, parents are encouraged to pick-up their children as soon as possible. All WRDSB operated Extended Day programs will be CLOSED.
- The media will read the appropriate area and/or list of schools as advised by STSWR.

Situation 3 (C.3)

- Due to current and expected weather conditions, all afternoon and evening shifts for WRDSB employees are cancelled.
- All evening rental permits are cancelled.

Situation 4 (C.4)

- Due to the current weather conditions, all afternoon and evening shifts for WRDSB employees are cancelled.

11. Extended Day Childcare Programs Operating during Non-Instructional Days (e.g., March Break, PD Days, Etc.)

Sometimes weather conditions will require closure of Extended Day Programs during non-instructional days.

11.1 The Manager responsible for Extended Day Programs is required to put into place a communication plan for staff and parents in the case of severe weather and program cancellation. The process for determining closure of Extended Day Programs due to severe weather is as follows:

11.1.1. The Director of Education or designate, in consultation with the Manager or designate responsible for Extended Day programs will monitor severe weather and will make a decision as to the cancellation of all Extended Day Programs.

11.2 The following actions are taken after a decision is made to cancel some or all Extended Day Programs:

11.2.1 Manager responsible for Extended DayPrograms initiates communication to Board Extended Day Program staff and Communications Officer

11.2.2 The Communications Officer or designate will post the appropriate message to the WRDSB website, to WRDSB's social media feed and to school websites upon communication from the Director of Education or designate.

11.2.3 Staff, students and parents are directed to reference the WRDSB website whenever severe weather is forecasted.

12. Continuing and Alternative Education Programs (evening and weekend programs such as Night School and International Language Programs)

Sometimes weather conditions will require closure of Continuing and Alternative Education Programs.

12.1 The System Administrator responsible for Continuing and Alternative Education Programs is required to put into place a communication plan for staff and parents in the case of severe weather and program cancellation. The process for determining closure of Saturday school programs or Night School due to severe weather are as follows:

12.1.1 The Director of Education or designate in consultation with the System Administrator or designate responsible for Continuing and Alternative Education Programs will monitor severe weather and will make a decision as to the cancellation of all Continuing and Alternative Education programs.

12.1.2 Every attempt will be made to make this decision before 6:00 a.m. For Saturday School Programs and by 4:00 p.m. for Night School Programs.

12.2 The following actions are taken after a decision is made to cancel all programs:

12.2.1 System Administrator responsible for Continuing and Alternative Education Programs initiates communication to Board Continuing and Alternative Education Program staff.

12.2.2 The Communications Officer or designate will post the appropriate message to the WRDSB website, to WRDSB's social media feed and to school websites upon communication from the Director of Education or designate.

12.2.3 Staff, students and parents are directed to reference the WRDSB website whenever severe weather may present an issue in terms of school closure.

13. Severe Weather During Secondary Exam Schedule

13.1 If any WRDSB buses are cancelled in any geographic area of Waterloo Region, the exam schedule in all secondary schools will be postponed. Details as to the impact on exam schedules and the Semester 2 start-up will be communicated to Secondary Administrators and other appropriate WRDSB staff, schools, parents and students in advance of the start of the exam schedule.

14. WCSSAA/WRDSSPHEA Scheduled Games

14.1 Where severe weather conditions emerge over the course of the school day, the Director of Education or designate(s) will communicate with the WCSSAA President and WCSSA and WRDSSPHEA Co-Instructional Program Leaders to indicate the cancellation of all WCSSAA and WRDSPHEA scheduled games for that day. They will, in turn, contact the schools to make them aware that planned activities have been cancelled. Every effort will be made to make this decision by noon of that day.