

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS – INCLEMENT WEATHER

Following the Ministry of Education’s Review of the Sudbury Student Services Consortium in 2010, the Ministry concluded that:

“The Consortium has implemented all the recommendations made in the original report and has also kept up with best practices in the sector, by adopting appropriate policies and practices. The Consortium’s actions and policies clearly demonstrate the Consortium’s commitment to, and focus on continuous improvement. The Consortium continues to demonstrate its leadership in many operational areas, as the Review team identified several unique best practices that can be replicated across the Province. The Follow-up Review has once again found the Consortium to be one of the leading Consortia in the Province and a model to be emulated by others throughout the Province.”

In 2013, the Executive Director of the Sudbury Student Services Consortium was invited to discuss its policies and procedures relating to inclement weather and transportation cancellation to the Transportation Industry. These policies and procedures were viewed as best practices.

The following questions may assist school boards when questioned by the public.

Question 1 - When will the Sudbury Student Services Consortium decide to cancel school bus transportation in bad weather?

The Sudbury Student Services Consortium will make every effort to announce the decision to cancel school buses before the start of the school day between 6:00 am and 7:00 am and as such, will forward announcements to the local radio stations and will post the information on the Sudbury Student Services Consortium’s website.

Question 2 – Why is the decision made so early?

The Sudbury Student Services Consortium is required to make the decision very early since many students who reside in outlying communities are picked up quite early. Some school bus drivers are on the roads as early as 5:30 am in order to arrive at their first stop on time.

Question 3 – In the event of inclement weather, should I send my child to school?

It is ultimately up to the parents/guardians to make the final decision to send their children to school during inclement weather.

Question 4 – Are school buses equipped with block heaters?

Yes, school buses are equipped with block heaters and are plugged in during the winter months.

Question 5 – Why is it so cold inside the school bus?

School purpose vehicles must comply with pollution emission restrictions. The emission restrictions provide a healthier ride to and from school; however, they reduce the engine's ability to produce heat inside the school bus on very cold days.

Question 6 – When school bus transportation is cancelled in the morning is it always cancelled in the afternoon?

Most of the time when school bus transportation is cancelled in the morning it is also cancelled in the afternoon. On very rare occasions, when the safety of students can be assured, the afternoon transportation may run. For example, extreme cold in the morning and a significant change in weather before the end of the school day may permit school bus transportation in the afternoon.

Question 7 – How long should students wait for their school bus during inclement weather?

During extreme cold weather or severe weather storm conditions, we recommend that parents remind their children of possible vehicle (bus) breakdown or delays. Parents are advised to exercise their own discretion as to how long their children should wait for a school bus in inclement weather. Parents should ensure that their children are dressed appropriately and have a back-up plan in place to allow for unforeseen circumstances.

Question 8 – If parents choose to transport their children to school during a full day transportation cancellation, who is responsible in the afternoon?

If inclement weather prevents buses from doing their morning and afternoon routes, parents who choose to transport their children to school must be prepared to pick up their children at the end of the school day.

Question 9 – What is involved in making the decision to cancel school bus transportation?

The decision to cancel school transportation services involves a number of people and is never taken lightly. Safety Officers, School Bus Operators, and Managers are on the roads as early as 4:00 am in order to report road conditions to the Sudbury Student Services Consortium by 5 am. The Consortium also reviews Environment Canada's Weather Warnings and investigates road conditions in different areas (i.e. Ministry of Transportation, Regional and Provincial Police statements, etc.)

Once bus companies report their findings to the Consortium, a variety of other factors are taken into consideration prior to the decision being made:

- Road Conditions – Often buses are on the roads before sanding and snow removal crews have begun their work.
- Snow and Ice Accumulation – Inclines, bridges, curbs and ramps can also pose as a danger.
- Weather Conditions in Specific Areas – It is possible that some areas may not be affected by bad weather. However, outlying area secondary school bus runs are also used to transport elementary students from different areas. As a result, cancellation of transportation services may be unavoidable.