

Rules covering ?snow days? explained by UGDSB official

Written By **BRIAN LOCKHART**

Snow days ? the term conjures up an image of unplowed streets and enough snow on the ground that schools close up until conditions can be made safe for both students and staff.

For some students, a snow day is a treat. For the more studious student, it's a disappointment.

Inclement weather has caused school bus cancellations several times this year and on two occasions there was a full system shut down.

This year it has been ice on the roads that have caused the disruption.

However, the schools have a contingency plan and procedures in place that ensure the school year and curriculum continue without disruption.

Heather Loney, Communications and Community Engagement officer for the Upper Grand District School Board, made it clear that there is a big difference between bus cancellations and a system shutdown that occurred during Tuesday's snowstorm.

?The school board does not make the decision to cancel buses,? Ms. Loney explained. ?The group that makes that decision is the Wellington Dufferin Student Transportation Services. They provide transportation for all five school boards in the area. The decision to cancel buses is made by the Transportation Consortium after consultation with the bus operators.?

Once a decision is made that conditions are unsafe to transport students, notices are sent out via various means to let people know the buses aren't running.

However, the schools are still open and classes continue even if the number of students who can attend is lower than normal.

?When it's a regular bus cancellation the schools remain open,? Ms. Loney explained. ?Any walking students can report to school and parents make a decision if they want to take students to school. It's still an instructional day. In some schools they have very few bused in students. In other schools the entire school is bused in. The school year calendar isn't adjusted because of those cancellations. In some cases you might have classes that are much more empty than others but the teacher is still there.?

Teachers adjust their classroom exercises to reflect the lower number of student.

The decision to cancel the bus routes is based on several factors according to Wendy Dobson, chief administrative officer at Service de transport de Wellington-Dufferin Student Transportation Services.

?It is a number of factors,? Ms. Dobson explained. ?We monitor Environment Canada and contact our bus operators and they give me feedback. We also speak to county road crews to get an assessment of road conditions and they provide information by 5:00 a.m. We make the call based on student safety.

A system shut-down occurs when all school and board facilities are closed.

?All schools are closed and all board offices are closed, but they are very rare,? Ms. Loney said of the two shut-down occurrences so far this year.

The decision to close schools is made at the administrative level based on bus reports, temperature, wind chill factor, blowing snow

and reduced visibility and projected weather condition.

The decision is made between 5:00 a.m and 6:00 a.m., and an alert sent out to media outlets and through social media.

With February only half over, more bus cancellations could occur, but of course that can't be predicted.