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Upper Grand District School Board updates expectations of students on no-bus days

Written By JOSHUA DRAKES

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No-bus days, typically caused by inclement weather, will no longer be considered days off, and students are expected to make their way to class if possible.

A new campaign by the Upper Grand District School Board (UGDSB) wants parents and students to know that going forward, the curriculum may continue regardless of bus cancellations or not. Previously, bus cancellations were treated by some students as a free day to stay home.

That's not the case, and the school board wants to clear the air.

Heather Loney, communications and public relations manager for the UGDSB, framed the situation as an awareness campaign rather than a change in practice.

?The Every Day Counts campaign, specifically around schools on no-bus days, isn't a change in guidelines or policy,? she said. ?Rather, the aim of the Every Day Counts campaign is to ensure families and students know that schools are open and learning still can happen on no bus days. And that students are welcome to attend when it is safe to do so.?

Loney said that it's not a binary change, and inclement weather and other factors will continue to be considered. If many students are absent for any reason, the curriculum can still be reduced or paused if necessary.

?As always, educators use their professional judgment when determining what to plan and teach during a lesson,? she said. ?There are often times when many students in a class are away or absent for a variety of reasons, including inclement weather. In these cases, it would not be unusual to reduce the amount of new material being taught or to focus more on consolidating previously learned concepts.?

Peggy Bond, chair of the Parent Involvement Committee at Orangeville District Secondary School, noted that a factor in this change was a concern from the schools about students losing valuable learning time on no-bus days.

?We had a lot of no bus days in January,? she said. ?I think it was up to nine or 10 in January, and then I think we had two in December. So, in our board here, we lost 11 learning days.?

She also said this raised concerns about what it might mean for higher-grade students looking to pursue post-secondary education.

?There was a definite learning loss to these students,? she said. ?Which, in the higher grades, means that they might be going to university a little less prepared than people in other geographic areas that don't lose these days.?

The goal of this change is to ensure the larger student body doesn't fall too far behind due to inclement weather.

Students who reside within the school's walking zone will be expected to attend on bus cancellation days, while students who rely on buses will not.

Students who walk to school and do not get to school will be marked with unexcused absences, while bus students will automatically have excused absences.

Ultimately, the Upper Grand District School Board's goal with the campaign is meant to strike a balance between maintaining consistent learning and recognizing the realities of winter travel in Dufferin County.

While families are encouraged to prioritize safety when deciding whether students can attend, officials hope the renewed emphasis on attendance will help minimize disruptions, preserve valuable classroom time, and ensure students remain on track academically.