



December 17, 2013

Dear Parents and Guardians:

Our recent winter storms have challenged all of us, and our schools have been working hard to ensure safety remains our top priority. While we recognize our recent weather has been a highly unusual weather pattern, we also recognize that it is a great opportunity to reflect, yet again, on our practices and procedures for responding as a division.

With the safety of students, staff and parents our highest priority, our Board of Education has supported our plan to close schools on extreme weather days when traveling is deemed unsafe for everyone.

To that end, Central Office is developing a procedure that will allow school closures to involve a single school, a community of schools or the entire school division. To keep this procedure relatively simple, we believe there are essentially three types of travel days that occur in our Division. We have coded these days Green (*all clear*), Yellow (*use caution*), and Red (*unsafe*).

- **Green days** – the days when it is clearly safe for everyone to travel. All buses are running and all of our schools are open.
- ▼ **Yellow days** – the days when buses might not run in some or all areas of the Division, but schools remain open. On **Yellow days**, we anticipate that the majority of people will be able to drive to their schools and that learning will proceed as it normally does. Here are a few illustrative examples of **Yellow days**:
 - Days (*like Wednesday, December 4*) when County crews need more time for snow removal to allow buses safe access to turn-arounds, yet many other vehicles can still make safe passage through our rural roads.
 - Days when there is fog, freezing rain, or low temperatures in the morning, but the weather is relatively fine for the rest of the day. This type of weather may disrupt bus service, but our staff and our parents can often travel safely simply by arriving a little later.
- **Red days** – **A given school, area or the entire division will be closed.** The days when we are faced with a full blown blizzard (*like the one we endured on Monday, December 2*) or when we still have a combination of heavy snow, high winds, and very low visibility (*like we faced on Tuesday, December 3*). On **Red days**, to ensure the safety of our staff, parents, and licensed older students, we feel we need to close schools not only for students, but also for staff. We believe this is the best way to ensure everyone's safety. It is important to note that a **Red day** may exist for one school, for one area (for example, all Sundre Schools), or for the entire Division. School closure days will be communicated the evening prior or early in the morning, before 6:30 a.m. whenever possible, through local radio stations, through Alert Solutions announcements directly to parents, through our Chinook's Edge website, Facebook and Twitter, and through the websites of the affected school(s). We will be asking our schools to do what they can to have at least one staff member on site on school closure days to ensure that no students are inadvertently dropped off at the front door of a school.

As well, we will be working closely with our schools and our teachers to ensure all schools have a learning plan in place that will address how they will provide meaningful opportunities for learning to continue for all students each day, no matter which 'code' the day falls under.

We hope to have all of the pieces in place as soon as possible. If you would like to pass on a comment to Central Office as we move forward with this new approach to inclement weather, please click on the following link: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/H9V9RPT>. Please see the Frequently Asked Questions section that follows this letter, and thank you for your patience as we try and learn from our recent experiences with Mother Nature.

I sincerely wish each of you the very best with your family and friends over the Christmas holidays!

Yours truly,



Kurt Sacher
Superintendent of Schools

Inclement Weather Procedure - Frequently Asked Questions

On a day when no buses are running, how will I know if the day is Red (school closure) or Yellow (learning is proceeding)?

As early as possible (prior to 6:30 a.m. preferably) we will send staff and parents a voice, email, and text message using Alert Solutions - our automated communication system. In addition, messaging will be shared via Facebook, Twitter, local radio stations, as well as school and division websites. Because we are sometimes without power during extreme weather, we will use all of these approaches to reach as many stakeholders as possible.

What will happen on a Red day if I don't receive notification that schools are closed and my child arrives at the school?

Schools will arrange, whenever possible, to have one or two staff members who can open front doors and greet students who do not receive the message. Staff members will then contact parents to notify them that the school is closed and wait with the students until parents arrive.

Why would the school division proceed with learning on Yellow days when buses are not running?

On yellow days, the majority of our students, parents, and staff have safe transportation to school. For example, consider a scenario where our buses are unable to operate because the temperature is -37 degrees Celsius. Because approximately 63% of our students live in town and many of our rural parents can drive students to school on these days, we would anticipate that as many as 90% of our students would have safe transportation to our schools. To have the majority of our students present and willing to learn, and not proceed with teaching and learning would not be fair to the students in attendance.

My child rides a bus, and we may be unable to provide safe transportation on Yellow days. Will she be penalized for missing school?

No. Teachers will help students catch up upon their return, just like they do when students are absent for other legitimate reasons such as illness and medical appointments. In addition, we will encourage a greater use of technology such as email and school websites to share information and assignments with students who are away.

If it is a Red day, what will schools do to move learning forward?

Staff will be working from home on Red Days. We will be working closely with our schools to ensure there is a learning plan in place that will address how they will provide meaningful opportunities for learning to continue for all students each day, no matter which ‘code’ the day falls under. We are exploring ways to use technology to continue teaching and learning on both Red Days and for students who are unable to make it into school on Yellow Days.

Under what circumstances would the division make different decisions for different schools or communities?

When extreme weather conditions are localized, there may be a need to approach a certain school or community differently. In addition, we have some schools with fewer than 10% rural bus riders and we have other schools with more than 80%. The percentage of rural bus riders may also play a role in assessing a Red day or a Yellow day for a specific school or community.

What are the next steps in fully developing this new approach?

All Chinook’s Edge staff, parents and guardians are receiving detailed information regarding the inclement weather procedure, and a survey has been created if anyone would like to forward a comment: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/H9V9RPT>. We hope to have this new Administrative Procedure written and formalized in January, but if we find ourselves with extreme weather conditions that impact one school, one area, or our entire division (like the December 2-3 blizzard) we would contemplate school closures if this were to occur prior to full implementation.