

**NLSchools** refers to all public K-12 English schools and school-related facilities under the jurisdiction of the Department of Education, Education Operations Branch and all employees working therein providing services and supports to such schools, including those who work in the areas of school facilities, student transportation, program implementation, student services, and procurement.

## Policy Name

Weather or Facilities Related School Closure

## Policy Statement

The Department of Education recognizes that a school or school system may have to close for a period of time in response to weather related events or infrastructure issues. The department will seek to minimize the loss of instructional time where possible while maintaining a safe school environment.

## Background

The policy for weather or facilities related school closure will:

1. Deal with weather related school delays or closures;
2. Allow facilities issues to be addressed in a timely manner, with minimal disruption to the school community; and
3. Establish common protocols related to weather and facilities issues that require school to close for a period of time.

## Scope

This policy defines procedures to employ in response to weather conditions or infrastructure issues affecting schools or school-related facilities within NLSchools.

## Policy Directives

1. NLSchools is responsible for the drafting, implementation and review of the administrative procedures pertaining to weather and facilities related school closure.
2. Notwithstanding the policy and procedures pertaining to weather related events, it is recognized that not every conceivable circumstance related to an individual student's transit to and from school can be accounted for. If a school remains open, the student's parents or guardians are in the best position to judge whether or not their child can safely transit to school or to and from school bus stops.

## Administrative Procedures

### 1. Weather Related School Delay/Closure

- 1.1 In recognition of the large geographical expanse of the province where local weather patterns may vary considerably, local discretionary power to close schools or delay openings will be delegated to an authorized zone administrator (normally a school administrator). In some cases, the authorized administrator will be responsible for just their own school. Where it is logical to group schools that share the same geography and climate, an authorized administrator will be responsible for decisions affecting a system of schools. Authorized administrators should consult with other administrators if there are multiple schools involved. The authorized zone administrators responsible for local coordination will be communicated annually.

1.2 If a major weather event is forecasted and is highly likely to interfere with the safe transit of students to school, it may be prudent to delay school, close for a portion of the day, or in extreme circumstances, close for the entire day. As a general rule the following are standard operating procedures:

- a) A delay should be for a set number of hours (that is, 1 or 2).
- b) Announcements should be communicated as soon as practical, normally between 6:30 and 7:00 am.
- c) All closures will normally indicate that there will be a further update by 10:30 am or 11:00 am.

1.3 Consideration must be given to the following criteria regarding weather delays or closures: Snowfall, wind, visibility, temperature, and road conditions. Weather forecasting and consulting services will be provided by the contracted weather service and accessed via email and web services and should be reviewed prior to any decision to close school. If practical, the Department of Transportation and Infrastructure, municipal authorities, and/or the local student transportation staff member or contractor should be consulted.

1.4 Temperature is a special criterion, especially in the more northern parts of the province. Due to the varying age, maturity and physical abilities of students attending the school system, school closure procedures for extreme cold weather will include three separate sections: K - 3, K - 7 and K - 12. The following temperatures must be used as guidelines in cancelling school due to extreme temperatures. These temperatures would also assume that students are properly dressed for the conditions. Where there is a risk of

frostbite Environment Canada advises that individuals “should dress in layers of warm clothing, with an outer layer that is wind resistant, cover exposed skin, wear a hat, mittens or insulated gloves, a scarf, neck tube or face mask and insulated waterproof footwear”. Please note that the wind chill temperatures listed reflect the Environment Canada formula:

Grade	Temperature
K - 3	-45°C
K - 7	-50°C
K - 12	-55°C

1.5 While it is impossible to predict every possible scenario, the following have occurred in the past and are included here for reference:

- a) **Forecasted Severe Full Day Weather Event:** If a major weather event is very severe and virtually certain to span the entire instructional day, a school or system of schools may close for an entire day. This would be in exceptional circumstances only as the norm will be to indicate that schools are closed for the morning with a further update by 10:30 am or 11:00 am.
- b) **Forecasted Morning Weather Event:** If a major weather event is forecasted for the morning only, it may be prudent to announce that schools will be closed for the morning session. In such cases, the protocol will be that a further announcement will be made at 10:30 am or 11:00 am with respect to the afternoon session.
- c) **Unforecasted Weather Event While School in Session:** Schools do not necessarily close early because the weather is deteriorating while school is in session. For example, it may be more prudent to keep school in session than

to dismiss at the height of a storm. However, if school is in session and a rapidly deteriorating forecast emerges, it may be prudent to close schools early ahead of the weather event in order to avoid unsafe conditions at the time of dismissal and travel home. If a decision is made to close schools early, it will be important for school administrators sharing busing systems to coordinate a dismissal time. If school is to be closed for the afternoon, it must be specified that afternoon kindergarten classes or KinderStart classes are cancelled. It is also important to refer to Sections

3.1 “Communications” and 3.2 “Early Closure Procedures” below.

- d) **Delayed Opening due to road conditions:** There may be situations where the weather event is concluded or abating but road conditions remain unsafe. In such cases it may be prudent to delay the opening of a school. To avoid confusion for such things as bus times, such delays should be in increments of one full hour. For example, “School X is delayed opening by two hours. All buses will commence their runs two hours later than normal”.

## 2. Facilities Related School Delay/Closure Procedures

- 2.1 **If any staff person arrives** at school in the morning and, upon initial review of heat, light, water, etc., finds a facility issue (e.g., no heat), they are to immediately inform the operations manager and school administrator.
- 2.2 The operations manager will assess the situation, visiting school and/or calling in tradesperson(s) as required.
- 2.3 Once the operations manager has determined the estimated time for the repair, they will inform the school administrator whether school can open as per normal schedule or requires a delayed opening or closure.
- 2.4 If there are communications difficulties or delays as a result of early morning identification of issues, school administrators may delay opening of school pending communication with facilities personnel.
- 2.5 If there is to be a morning closure of school, the announcement must reference the fact that there will be an update by 10:30 am or 11:00 am.
- 2.6 If the closure decision occurs after buses have started, and there is no imminent safety concern, school administrators will allow children to be dropped off at school by buses in order to ensure parents/guardians have sufficient notice about the school closure.
- 2.7 If a facilities issue arises during the instructional day, it may be prudent to close a school early. In such cases it is advisable to announce the closure with sufficient lead time for buses to arrive and/or for parents to arrange pickup for younger children. During heat/light outages, staff must be assigned to circulate through the school to help ensure the safety of all the school’s occupants until dismissal. As with unscheduled closures due to weather, if school is to be closed for the afternoon, it must be specified that afternoon kindergarten classes or KinderStart classes are cancelled. It is also important to refer to [Sections 3.1 “Communications”](#) and [3.2 “Early Closure Procedures”](#) below.
- 2.8 It is requested that once a decision has been made to close a school, school administration inform the appropriate Director of Schools for their family of schools. The operations managers are empowered to make the open/close decision but not in isolation of the school administration.

## 3. Common Protocols for Weather and/or Facilities Related Closure

- 3.1. **Communications:** Clear and timely communication with parents or guardians is key regarding school closures. At the commencement of the school year, school

administrators must inform parents, guardians and students through a school newsletter and during curriculum night of how the school will be announcing school closures. Announcements and notifications to parents will be made utilizing:

- a) [School status report](#) on the website. (The updating of the school status in a timely and consistent manner once the decision is made to close is critical);
- b) Automated notifications through telephone calls, emails, and/or text messaging;
- c) Local media announcements. (School administrators should determine in advance of the first weather event if the local media require a code in order to ensure the school closure announcement is legitimate.); and
- d) Twitter and/or the school's webpage (if accessible).

3.2. **Early Closure Procedures:** The communication procedures in section 3.1 should be employed in the event of an early closure due to weather or a facilities related issue. In addition, **emergency contact numbers should also be on file at school for each student. For younger students in Grade Kindergarten to 6 additional protocols are required:**

- a) School administrators will request parents/guardians to provide any instructions to be followed for individual students in the event of an early emergency closure. This will cover any special considerations regarding busing or pickup at the school.
- b) **Contact must be made with parents or guardians of K-6 students.** Contact is defined as the school receiving a pre-determined automated message confirmation, directly speaking to the parent/guardian, or an email response from a parent/guardian confirming they are in receipt of the closure notification.
- c) Any communications should indicate to parents/guardians that there could be delays with busing and that bused students will be dismissed once the buses arrive at school.
- d) Parents/guardians should be advised that they have the option to pick up their children prior to the announced dismissal time.

3.3. **Busing:** Bus contractors/foreman/drivers have the authority to "delay" a bus run due to the local road conditions or mechanical problems. In such cases, the school will be advised by the bus contractor/foreman/driver. If a school is so advised, this only means that a given bus run will be late. Students should be delivered to the school when it is possible to do so. Bus contractors / foreman / drivers have no authority to cancel bus runs. School administrators must exercise judgment concerning closures when only specific and/or isolated areas have road conditions that do not allow buses to travel safely. For example, if the vast majority of students are able to arrive at school safely, school should not close.

3.4. **Teaching and Support Staff:** The operating collective agreements outline the requirements for staff in the event of weather-related shutdowns.

3.5. **Office Closures:** If a decision is made to close an office or worksite other than a school it will be communicated on the [NLSchools Status Central Website](#).