

FACILITIES

Policy 703.7-G (previously Policy 903.7-G)

Closing of Schools

Schools provide an important public service to the community. Closure has a significant impact on tens of thousands of families who are already challenged by the snow event that schools also face. Those in the community with the least resources are least able to manage and are most affected by a decision to close schools. Consequently, schools will not be closed due to snow or other weather conditions unless these result in a declaration of a civic emergency by the Richmond Emergency Management Office, emergency vehicles cannot access schools expeditiously or there is damage to a particular school which creates an unacceptable safety risk.

During snow events it is common for police and other authorities to advise citizens to avoid unnecessary travel. These advisories do not constitute direction to close public facilities and should not be interpreted as implying school closure.

Staff, students and parents should assume that schools will be open every day during the school year. During a snow event, or other weather event, there will be no public announcement that schools are open. Only closures will be announced.

Should it become necessary to close schools, that decision will be made as early as possible - no later than 6:00 a.m. - and announced via the following media outlets: CKNW AM 980 radio, News AM 1130 radio, CBC AM 690 radio, Fairchild AM 1470 radio, CHQM FM 103.5 radio, CBC television, BCTV, City TV and CTV BC.

In addition, a scrolling notice will be placed on the district web site and a voice message on the district switchboard (604-668-6000).

In the fall of each year, prior to any anticipated snow event, schools will inform parents about school and district procedures. This notice will include an explanation that schools will remain open except under extreme emergency conditions.

An explanation of school closure conditions and announcements will also be placed on the District web site in advance of any anticipated snow event. (See text appended)

Schools will not be closed during the school day because of snow or other weather conditions. However, if necessary, elementary students may be released before the end of the school day into the care of a parent/guardian or other approved caregiver. Secondary students may be released early without supervision. Both elementary and secondary schools will remain open for students who require them until the end of the regular school day.

Staff Attendance

It is the responsibility of each staff member to arrange for his or her transportation to work, whatever the weather conditions.

However, recognizing that even prudent preparation for snow conditions may not enable some staff members to safely attend work, provisions have been made in Collective Agreements for such an emergency. The District does not wish staff to take undue risks in order to get to work.

CUPE members may choose to take a day of holiday or to take a leave without pay.

RTA members may take an Unforeseen Emergency Leave. However, the District may also choose to offer staff who are unable to get to work, and who live in school districts where local conditions have resulted in a district-wide closure of schools, an additional day of work in the summer in order to avoid loss of income. This practice is intended to provide an equivalent option to the holiday elective for CUPE members.

Student Attendance

Students are encouraged to attend school on a snow day. However, it is understood that some students travel to school in ways that may not be possible or safe on a snow day. Therefore, no student will be penalized for lack of attendance. Student safety is the first priority of the District.

Parents/Guardians are responsible for their children's safe travel to school on a snow day. If, for any reason, a parent/guardian feels that a child cannot travel safely to school they should make other arrangements. Schools will be kept open to provide the option of attendance for all families but the decision to attend is the responsibility of each family.

Regular and special needs school busses will attempt to operate on their normal schedule during a snow day. Significant changes to the regular bus schedule as a result of weather conditions will be reported on the district web site (www.sd38.bc.ca). Should the condition of side streets require a change to the operation of special needs school busses, or any cancellation of service, all affected families will be informed individually by telephone.

Clearing of Snow

Custodial staff are equipped to clear snow from sidewalks and walkways around schools and to salt those surfaces. On a snow day this is a priority task. Entrances should be cleared before staff and students arrive. Remaining sidewalks should be cleared as early as possible, including city sidewalks that adjoin school property.

Schools that do not have a morning custodian are assigned an itinerant custodian for school opening tasks (disable alarm system, perimeter security check etc.). These custodians typically leave the building locked but ready for easy opening by the first staff member with keys and codes to arrive. On snow days they will also ensure that entrance ways are cleared. If the volume of snow makes this impossible the afternoon shift custodian may be moved to a 6:30 a.m. start on a voluntary basis with other staff assigned to cover schools where a voluntary shift change is declined, and if even more assistance is required other staff from the works yard may be assigned to this task and dispatched on an emergency basis.

The Grounds Department will equip four trucks with a plow and salt spreading equipment in order to clear access routes and parking lots. Additional contractors will be engaged as

possible to speed this work.

Pre-salting of parking lots will be done if warranted. Clearing of access routes and parking lots will begin as soon as possible after a snowfall of sufficient magnitude to impair vehicle traffic, and may begin during a snowfall if necessary. The Grounds Crew, and possibly other staff, will be called out according to the provisions of the CUPE Collective Agreement whenever necessary to accomplish this task.

The first priority, which will be completed before staff and students arrive, will be to clear an access route at each school that provides entrance from the street for drop off of students and staff access to the parking lot (but not full clearing of the lot itself). The area to be cleared will be agreed in advance with each school according to its snow day procedures (see below).

Clearing of parking lots will occur as soon as access has been provided to all sites and according to a priority list that considers busses, special needs access, continuing education use and unique local circumstances. Schools are encouraged to have staff park their vehicles in such a way as to leave portions of the parking area free for access by snow clearing equipment. Otherwise, clearing must occur after the lots have been vacated. This can delay clearing because compacted snow can become ice if the temperature is low and hard ice can be impossible to clear until the temperature rises.

It should be recognized that a priority focus on snow clearing may cause disruption or delay to other functions at the school or district level as personnel and resources are focused on this task.

School Snow Day Procedures

Schools will:

- Develop local snow day protocols that complement district procedures by providing for clearing of entrances and walkways, keeping hallways dry, consulting with the Grounds Department about snow clearance priorities and procedures for the school grounds and other contingencies as necessary.
- Develop contingency plans on the assumption that a snow day will not be business as usual and may well require coverage for administrators, teachers and support staff who are late or unable to get to work.
- Annually review snow day procedures with staff in the fall of the year.
- Include a description of snow day procedures in student planners and handbooks.
- Inform parents of snow day procedures by notice in advance on any anticipated snow event.