

HOW SCHOOL CANCELLATIONS DECISIONS ARE MADE

School cancellation decisions are not arrived at without a great deal of thought. On any given day, there are a minimum of 200 District staff that commute to work, a large number from outside the District. There are also at least 250 students who drive cars and an unknown number of parents that drive their students to school. Also, decisions affect custodial and food service programs within the District.

How do we know when it will be bad?

On the nights when it looks like there may be a problem from looking at the weather report and current conditions, the Transportation Supervisor is usually up checking temperatures conditions and forecasts throughout the night. If it looks like conditions may get to the point where there could be a problem, it is time to head out and start driving roads throughout the District and checking conditions such as: temperature, moisture amounts, and whether the temperature is rising or falling. Sometimes this may require calling additional help to check out specific areas quickly to determine if a problem is in just one area or throughout the District. Our district now solicits person-to-person contact with NOAA Weather station based out of Portland.

If when checking roads, the driver has trouble controlling the vehicle while driving, stopping, and starting, that is a good indication that a bus will have the same problem. Keep in mind that our District buses are picking students up in front of their houses and many of our students must walk down long driveways and side roads to get to the bus stop. There aren't many bus stops that are on flat ground. The bus must get started and going without going off the road. The student must be able to safely board the bus without slipping and sliding under the bus or wheels of the approaching bus. Most of our routes have inclement weather bus stops.

In our district elevations range from 250 feet in some lower areas to over 2,000 feet in others. Estacada High School is at 500 feet, when the snow level is hanging around 1,000 feet, half our District may be covered in snow while the lower half is covered in a cold wet rain. Also remember that most of the weather forecasts we see on TV are for the Portland Metro area. We are in a small niche between the Willamette Valley, the Cascades, and the Columbia Gorge, and our weather can be a mix of weather from all three. Our District is unique from the surrounding areas, as other Districts are all just a little different in their relationship to the valley, mountains, and gorge.

It is important to make a decision by 5:30 AM at the latest on mornings where there may be a problem, because parents and staff need time to make arrangements for the day if there is a change in the normal schedule. The first bus leaves the bus garage by 6:15 AM and District staff are on the road before then trying to make it to work. Sometime before 5:30 AM the Transportation Supervisor, team of staff, and the Superintendent are on the phone comparing notes trying to make the best decision for all involved for the day. If there is a change in schedule, the news media is alerted via the internet on

<http://www.flashnews.net/pdx.html>. From there radio and TV stations pick it up and broadcast it. It is also posted on the District website <http://www.esd108.org/>. Staff and parents can watch or listen for reports on local TV and radio stations or go to either of the above websites for the information.

The following are some of the considerations for making a determination regarding weather related schedule changes:

- Condition of roads;
 - Will Snow Routes work
 - Do we expect that conditions will improve or degrade in the next hour or two
- Weather Forecast;
 - Is the forecast for improving favorable conditions or for worsening of current conditions?
- Expertise of drivers in affected areas.
- Student drivers who will be making their way to school.
- Staff ability to make it to work. Will the District have enough teaching and support staff to support students if we get them here?
- Discussions with surrounding Districts and local agencies.
 - What are conditions surrounding our District;
 - How many of our staff must travel through those Districts to get to work.
 - Talk about mutual turnarounds.
 - Are their conditions worsening or improving and does it look like it is heading our way.
 - Discussions with emergency personnel, snow-plow operators, State and City will occur
- Power outages, how many homes or schools are without power in our District.

What can you do?

- Turn on the radio or television and watch for information about Estacada Schools.
- Turn on your computer and go to <http://www.flashnews.net/pdx.html>, and click on current conditions. Check “Clackamas County”. This is where the District posts the information for news outlets to get the information. Sometimes newsrooms get busy and do not always go back and check for updates or they might miss some information. Call the Estacada School District transportation office at 503-630-8606. Phones are usually very busy on these mornings.
- For “1 or two hour delay situations”, continue to monitor information sources to get any updated information that may be posted. The “delay” gives the District time to see if conditions improve and classes could still be canceled if conditions do not improve or if conditions worsen.
- Be aware that even though the weather in your area may not seem bad, our District covers 750 square miles and nearly 2,000 feet in varying elevations.
- If snow routes and inclement weather bus stops are activated these both will be for the AM routes as well as the PM routes.
- If school is cancelled for the day all out of district trips and school related activities will be cancelled.