

## **How school cancellation Decisions are made.**

These decisions are not arrived at without a great deal of thought. On any given day, there is 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 to school each day and an unknown number of parents drive their students to school. Decisions also affect custodial and food service programs.

**How do we know when it will be bad?** On the nights when it looks like there might be a problem from looking at the weather report and current conditions, the Transportation Supervisor is usually up and looking out the window, checking temperatures conditions and forecasts throughout the night. If it looks like conditions may get to the point where they 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, is the temperature rising or falling? Sometimes this may require calling additional help to check out specific areas quickly to determine if a problem is just in one area or throughout the District.

Driving a school bus is like driving a full size pick-up with only rear wheel drive. 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. 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.

Elevations in our District 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 definitely unique from the surrounding areas as the other Districts are all just a little different in their relationship to the valley, mountains and gorge.

Often times if a storm is coming if from the Gorge, it may create severe winter conditions in one end of the District and leave the other side relatively clear. A storm coming up from the South or West may do the opposite or totally shut down everything around our District while only touching our District.

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 6:05 AM and District staff are on the road before then trying to make it to work. Sometime before 5:30 AM the Transportation Supervisor 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 they 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 in Districts 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 they are heading our way
  - Discussions with emergency personnel, snow-plow operators, and even paper delivery people that may be traveling in our District
- 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 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.
- 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.