

The Education Act and Regulations define the instructional contact requirements for staff and students. The NWT Teachers' Association Collective Agreement further defines the maximum number of sessional days for teachers. Council wishes to minimize emergency school closures so that the required instructional contact hours are met and so as to maximize the effective use of human resources. While the Regulations provide that District Education Authorities (DEAs) may temporarily close a school for health or safety reasons, the South Slave DEAs and Council hereby delegates responsibility for all school closures to the superintendent. The Minister reserves the right to require schools to make up any lost instructional time.

Schools in the region shall remain open at all times on regular school instructional days. The Superintendent may authorize an *Emergency School Closure* or the *Unplanned Cancellation of Classes*.

### 1) Emergency School Closures

**Purpose:** This policy specifies the conditions under which schools in the South Slave region may be closed to both students and staff. These closures, viewed as exceptional measures, are authorized by the Superintendent in the following situations:

- a. **Wildfires:** In the event of nearby wildfires, school closure will be considered based on air quality, proximity of the fire, and directives from Northwest Territories Forest Management. The decision will prioritize the health and safety of students and staff and the potential risks of evacuation in emergency situations.
- b. **Extreme Cold Weather:** Schools will not close under extreme cold weather conditions. The safety and well-being of students and staff is our primary concern. However, it is important to recognize that schools serve as a 'safe haven' for students. As such, schools will remain open during extreme cold weather.
- c. **Blizzards:** Schools may be closed during severe blizzards with white-out conditions, where visibility is severely impaired, posing risks of disorientation and danger to staff and students.
- d. **Fire, Fumes or Hazardous Chemicals:** School principals are expected to evacuate the school immediately in the event of a fire, noxious fumes, or hazardous chemical spills in the building.
- e. **Communicable Diseases:** The Chief Public Health Officer for the NWT will be consulted in consideration of closing schools due to influenza or other communicable disease concerns in a community.

- f. **Floods:** Schools may be closed in the event of a flood and may be closed during cleanup and repair. The length of closure depends on the severity of the damage and lingering health hazards.

## 2) **Unplanned Cancellation of Classes**

**Purpose:** This policy defines scenarios where the school remains operational, but some or all students may be exempt from attending classes. During these situations, staff members are expected to be present and continue with their duties. The Superintendent is authorized to cancel classes under the following conditions:

- a) **Bussing cancellations** - While school bus contractors may choose to discontinue service at certain temperatures, schools will remain open and staff will continue instruction to those students who show up.
- b) **Power and/or Heating failures** - The effect of power or heating failures on student instruction will depend in large part on the time of year, availability of natural lighting and the duration. Generally, power or heating failures would have to be of considerable duration before dismissal of students would be considered.
- c) **Water failures** - Water failures can have a fairly immediate effect on a consideration to dismiss students. The duration of a water shortage is a prime consideration for two reasons:
  - i) health issues related to the availability of washroom facilities, and
  - ii) code considerations for fire sprinkler systems. Certain schools, because of the town mains supply situation have been instructed by local fire authorities that they must evacuate in short order if there is a public water failure to the school building.

### **Notes**

- Schools will remain open. This is to ensure that any children who still arrive at the school are cared for and if needed, that arrangements are made for their safe return home.
- It remains the responsibility of the parents/caregiver to determine whether or not it is safe to send or otherwise transport their children to and from school. The absence will be recorded as “excused.” This means the student is absent with the permission of their parent/caregiver.
- Once the student has entered school property (including the school busses if they are running) the safety of the student becomes and remains the responsibility of the school staff until the student has left the school property.
- The Principal shall obtain authorization from the Superintendent prior to the notification of staff, parents or the media, of dismissal of any or all students of a school because of a threat to their safety or well-being. Only the principal or his/her designate has the authority to notify the media of a school closure upon receipt of Superintendent approval.
- The school principal and his/her school staff remain responsible to ensure the safety of students while in their care, and until they are in the custody of their parents/caregivers should they be dismissed early.
- The Principal shall advise the DEA of all emergency school closings and unplanned class cancellations.

- If a school or portion of a school is to remain closed for an extended time, Department or Ministerial approval will be required.

Reference: Section 4, Academic Year and School Attendance Regulations  
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