

Tahlequah Public Schools Inclement Weather Transportation Plan

- **Inclement Weather with Ice and Snow**

From time to time throughout the school year, weather may force a change in the District's normal operating routines. The District will make every effort to adhere to the established school calendar, bell schedules, and routes. However, there may be times when weather conditions make the usual routes unsafe or impassable. This document provides information about how decisions are made regarding the delay or possible closure of school, how information is disseminated to families, and what parents and guardians can expect.

As inclement weather and traffic will affect bus schedules and routes, we ask that families be patient and understanding. We will do everything in our control to provide accurate information regarding pick-up times for students. Please remember, the safety of your children is our primary concern.

Recommendation and Decisions

At approximately 2 a.m. on inclement weather days, designated School District transportation and operational personnel begin ongoing communications with district administration staff. School District transportation staff will drive roads throughout Cherokee County to determine the ability to safely transport students via school buses. The determination will be based on the status of arterials (major and minor), noting specific challenging areas; condition of school facilities; and existing and anticipated weather patterns as reported by weather outlets, various news stations and surrounding school districts.

Between 4 and 4:30 a.m. on these days, transportation staff will call the Executive Director of Operations with their recommendations. The Executive Director and Superintendent render the decision for that day's operations. When at all possible, decisions regarding school delays or closures are made by 5 a.m. for Tahlequah Public Schools.

Family Preparation for Inclement Weather

It is the responsibility of each family to have an inclement weather plan in place that can be put into action on short notice. We ask that you make sure your children have an alternate place to stay if you must be at work on a day when school has been delayed or canceled. Please ensure that a neighbor, family member or center is able to care for or receive students, and please instruct students to report directly home or to their established care center immediately on arrival in the evening.

PROCEDURES FOR SNOWFALL DURING SCHOOL HOURS

Ice and snow conditions occurring during the school day can cause significant transportation problems in returning students to their homes.

The following procedures will be utilized to provide the best possible service under these conditions:

A. COMMUNICATIONS

If a major snowfall or snowfall alert occurs while school is in session, and the Superintendent decides to release school early, the District's Administration Team notifies families via the automated School Messenger system. The Administration Office also places a notice on the District's website and alerts the media.

The Administration Office notifies school district staff, including principals, Boy's and Girl's Club, ICTC, via email. Staff are also notified via the School Messenger system.

B. DECISIONS

Depending on the evaluation of several factors, such as time of day, availability of drivers and road and weather conditions, a decision will be made whether to dismiss schools early, on schedule, or to hold students until conditions improve to ensure buses can proceed through traffic.

If there is a decision to dismiss schools early, high school students who drive will be dismissed first and then all schools will be dismissed at the same time.

C. RESPONSIBILITIES

Each building principal or program manager will be responsible for the following:

1. BOARDING OF BUSES

Ensure all students board their assigned buses. No alternate bus transportation will be considered unless a parent or guardian contacts the school, the building administrator or designee approves the request and a bus pass is issued for the student rider.

The principal or program managers may not leave the building until after all of the buses have completed their routes and the Transportation Office has been contacted.

2. RECEIVING CENTER FOR OTHER SCHOOLS

A receiving school may be necessary to receive students from buses unable to complete routes due to weather and street conditions. Drivers are instructed that if it is impossible to continue a route, or if it is 7 p.m., they are to proceed to a designated receiving school to be determined at that time during the inclement weather and escort their students into the building. Staff will make every effort to contact parents in this event, however please call (918) 458-4100 for more information on which location will be the receiving site for the students.

3. STUDENT MEDICAL PROBLEMS

For all students who have severe, complicated or fragile medical conditions, emergency transportation plans shall be discussed. Such discussion should include the parents, staff, building principal, and school nurse. Plans may include, as appropriate, retention at home, principal contacts with parents to pick up students at the first indication of school closure or adverse weather conditions, emergency transportation, etc...

- **Inclement weather with tornadoes**

According to the National Weather Service, tornadoes can occur any time of day or night, any time of the year. In Oklahoma, peak tornado occurrences are from April to June and between 4 p.m. and 9 p.m. School administrators and the transportation department routinely monitor weather reports for the prediction of severe weather or announcements of a tornado warning.

- If the warning is announced at or near the dismissal of the school day, students are to remain in the building in a designated safe area.
- If the warning is announced while en route, a school bus driver is to go to a pre-identified shelter or building closest to their current location depending on the immediacy of the tornado threat.
- If caught in the direct path of a tornado or one is sighted and pre-identified shelter is not accessible the school bus driver is to:

Stop and evacuate the passengers. The bus driver will advise the transportation office of their bus number and location, seek safety in a below ground level area, such as a ditch, ravine, or depression in a location that is away from the bus; and where practical on the side of the road without power lines, utility poles, trees, etc...

Frequently Asked Questions

1. How do I find out if the District has closed schools because of snowfall?

You can learn if schools are closed or delayed through a number of ways:

- The District website at www.tahlequahschools.org;
- A phone call sent from SchoolMessenger, the District's automated notification system;
- Checking local television stations, including the following:

Channel 2 - KJRH

Channel 6 - KOTV

Channel 8 - KTUL

Channel 23 - KOKI

- Checking local radio stations, including the following:

AM Radio Stations:

740 KRMG

FM Radio Stations

102.1 KEOK

There may be up to a 30-minute delay for television and radio stations to broadcast this information once they receive it from the District. In addition, some television and radio stations may modify the message slightly before broadcasting it.

2. How and when does the District make a decision about closing schools due to snowfall?

If snow occurs during non-school hours: District staff will survey road conditions, monitor projected weather patterns, and provide a recommendation on the safety of transporting students. . Every attempt will be made to finalize the decision to close school prior to the following day, however the final decision will be made no later than 5 a.m. of the morning before school. The decision will be communicated through the methods indicated in the first question. This early decision allows parents to plan their day.

If snow occurs during the school day – or if a major snowfall alert is issued by the weather service during the school day: District staff will evaluate the effect weather conditions have on safe transportation of students and may decide to:

- Close schools early;
- Maintain normal operating hours; or
- Delay bus departure time until traffic conditions improve.

The Superintendent will decide by midday either to release school early or continue to operate school for a full day.

3. What kinds of announcements does the District make?

If snowfall occurs – and schools are open on time and operating on regular routes – no announcement will be made.

The District makes one of the following four announcements if:

- (1) Schools open on time – buses operating on snow routes.
- (2) Schools open two hours late – buses operating on snow routes.
- (3) Schools open two hours late – buses operating on regular routes.

In the case of any of the above three announcements, all school and program staff are expected to report at the regular time. (No hot breakfast will be served on late start days)

- (4) Schools closed.

If the District makes any of these four announcements, the following transportation may also be canceled for that day:

- Before- and after-school activity routes;
- Field/athletic trips;
- Out-of-District routes.

4. What is a snow route and how is it determined? Why is it different than a regular route?

The District identifies centrally located streets and major arterials that will be cleared first in the event of a snowstorm. These roads are called snow routes and buses use these routes to improve student safety.

5. I've noticed that sometimes schools are closed throughout the District even though there's no snow in Tahlequah. Why is this?

The School District's boundaries encompass 776 square miles of Cherokee County. Although the city area may be clear, there may be ice and snow in outlying areas, side streets and hills.

The District must consider the safety of all students when making a decision about whether or not to close schools.

6. I'm a parent or guardian and my student has been assigned transportation. How do I find out where my child should catch the bus if the District is on snow routes?

Both regular and snow routes are posted on www.tahlequahschools.org under the Transportation tab. Parents may also call (918) 458-4168 to identify their snow route.

7. Are there winter safety tips you have for students for getting ready for school?

- Students should be dressed properly for the weather as transportation delays will occur.
- Students should be brightly dressed and easy to see.
- Items should be placed in a backpack or school bag, thus making hands free to be used for stability.
- Students should arrive at the bus stop five minutes before the scheduled pickup time.

8. Are there safety tips you have for walking to the bus stop?

- Allow extra time in the morning to get to the bus stop on time.
- Wear bright clothing so the bus driver and other motorists can see you in the early morning and late evening.
- Dress properly for the weather. Winter clothing, hats, mittens and boots will keep you warm.
- Pedestrian travel should be done on sidewalks or a safe walking path. When there is no sidewalk and you have to walk on the road, be sure to walk facing traffic.
- Watch traffic while walking to your stop. Vehicles may lose control in the snow and ice and you need to be aware of your surroundings.
- Ensure your balance by walking with hands out of pockets, free from unnecessary materials.
- Young children should be walked to the bus stop; older children should walk in groups.
- When crossing a street, look left, right and left. Walk across a street at corners, use crosswalks whenever possible. Do not run.
- Be careful around cars parked along the street. Drivers coming down the street may not see you.
- Listen for the sound of car motors, sirens, horns or emergency announcements before stepping into the street.