

**March 11, 2026**

## **2025-26 Regional School Advisory Council (RSAC) - Meeting 2**

The Regional School Advisory Council (RSAC) and Regional Executive Director (RED) Steve Gallagher was joined by HRCE Operations Director Kavita Khanna, Communications Coordinator Kelly Connors and Communications Officer Lindsey Bunin to discuss the factors that go into weather-related school closures, delayed starts and early dismissals.

The decision to impact learning and school operations prioritizes student safety and relies on the use of meteorological data, real-time road conditions and coordination between Operations, Communications and the RED.

### **School Closure Decision-Making Process:**

- **Data and timing:** Gathering weather data starts at 5:00 a.m. using a specialized weather service, which provides detailed forecasts, pavement temperatures and visibility thresholds.
- **Transportation and Road Assessment:** HRCE's three transportation service providers have staff on the roads as early as 4:30 a.m. to check both main and side roads, with particular attention to 'winter stops' locations that are regularly problematic during weather events. This ensures real-time road conditions are communicated for decision-making.
- **Regional variability:** Weather impacts are evaluated by geographic area and families of schools, recognizing that conditions can vary significantly across the region and decisions are made based on local safety data.
- **Delayed Start Logistics:** The team explained that delayed starts are set as a two-hour delay from each school's normal start time to accommodate the tiered bus system and ensure safe arrival, though this can result in awkward schedules and reduced instructional time for some students.
- **Communication:** The final decision is made after a 5:30 a.m. team call, with the RED bearing responsibility for the outcome, and once communicated, the decision cannot be reversed due to the early start of bus operations and the need to inform families promptly.

### **Impacts of Weather-Related School Closures**

The wide-ranging effects of weather-related impacts to school operations was discussed, highlighting the logistical and education implications felt by students, staff, families, and the broader community.

- **Safety Prioritization:** Student safety is the primary concern in all decisions, as mandated by the Education Act. HRCE encompasses a large geographic area which can lead to only
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certain areas being closed or delayed based on localized conditions. This can cause confusion but is necessary due to the region's size and variable weather impacts.

Media headlines can create misconceptions about weather severity which leads to misunderstanding and frustration of how weather-related decisions are made in HRCE compared to other regions, provinces and countries.

- **Impacts on Families:** School closures affect not only students and staff but also parents, employers, and even organizations like the US consulate, as many entities align their operations with HRCE's decisions, impacting the city's economic output.

Delayed start and early dismissal were discussed and recognized as the least popular option due to the logistical challenge they present staff and families.

Some council members suggested that weather related impacts to school operations may be confusing to newcomers as they adjust to their new communities. It was suggested that language barriers may add to the misunderstanding of these processes.

- **Access to School-Based Supports:** Closures disrupt access to essential services, such as food programs, guidance, and specialist support, which are critical for many students beyond academic instruction. The decision to disrupt these supports in the daily lives of students is strongly considered when assessing a weather-related decision.
  - **Feedback Collection and Review:** A feedback form is provided after each weather decision, and the team reviews all responses. The positive and negative comments are used to assess public sentiment and identify areas for improvement.
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