



Cowichan Valley School District

NEWS RELEASE

February 16, 2017

For Immediate Release

Record Breaking Snowfalls Result in First Ever Two-Day Snow Closure in SD79

No one at the School District, even the longest term employees, can remember having two back-to-back snow days in the Cowichan Valley, let alone a third snow day in the same week. But a run of severe snowstorms, freezing rain and impassible roads kept students and teachers home for three days during the week of February 6th, 2017 (Monday, February 6th, Tuesday February 7th and Thursday February 9th).

The decision about whether or not to declare a snow day starts at 3:00 in the morning, when the School District Director of Operations starts work. He reviews weather reports and checks power outages. District Staff communicate with Mainroad South Island Contracting – their crews are already out clearing and have up-to-the minute information. By 3:30 am, 4 School District managers are driving to their assigned territories, assessing driving and walking conditions. By the time he calls Superintendent Rod Allen at 5:00 am, the team has the best information available to make a decision.

The only consideration is safety. “You can’t let the number of previous snow days affect the decision,” says Allen. “Unsafe is unsafe. And we don’t make the call lightly.”

If the roads are unsafe at 5:30 am Allen calls the Vancouver Island media so it’s on the news in time for families to make arrangements to have kids home for the day. He also starts a phone tree, triggering calls to staff throughout the District. By 6 am the announcement is on the District website, staff are in the know, it’s on the news and has been picked up by social media.

The District busses are designed and equipped to manage most snowfalls. Simply by virtue of their weight, the treads move through slush and snow down to the pavement. Most buses sand in front of the drive wheels for traction. Drivers are trained and accredited. The District has 31 busses, and routes cover 2200 kilometres daily, transporting about 3300 students to 14 schools.

Once the snow stops, crews are out late into the evening, and all weekend getting lanes and parking lots ready for kids and families to return to school.

While the final decision on a District snow day is up to the Superintendent, parents should certainly keep children home if they feel it's warranted. As Allen says, "Even if schools are open, and you think the kids should stay home, then keep them home. Safety is priority one!"

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