



NEWS RELEASE

Tuesday, June 26, 2007

Board of Education approves Transportation Communication Protocol

SASKATOON, June 26, 2006 – The Greater Saskatoon Catholic Schools Board of Education voted Monday to implement a new Transportation Communication Protocol to be followed in the event of a student busing emergency.

The protocol details responsibilities and tasks to be carried out by school and board office staff when a transportation emergency, such as a motor vehicle accident or medical problem, occurs. The protocol also sets out what action should be taken by the company busing the students. Currently, First Bus Canada provides busing services for Greater Saskatoon Catholic Schools.

The protocol was drafted by the division after a May 30 incident involving students from St. Matthew School. On that day, after the children were picked up for their trip home from school, the bus driver deviated from the regular route, began driving erratically and was not in contact with First Bus dispatchers.

Many points in the protocol's action plan resulted from input and suggestions heard from the parents of the St. Matthew children directly involved in the May 30 incident. In meetings held afterwards, parents voiced strong concern that there was little information available to them as the incident unfolded.

Once the protocol was drafted, parents were invited to a meeting to review the document before it was presented to trustees. While the plan has been approved for implementation, the parents are welcome to bring forward any changes or proposals to ensure the plan addresses their concerns.

The plan has also been sent to all Greater Saskatoon Catholic Schools principals for their review and input.

As well, First Bus is moving forward with other initiatives to complement the new Transportation Communication Protocol. It has implemented a "late bus line" that parents may call to determine if a problem has occurred with their child's bus. At the same time, First Bus and, if necessary, school staff, will be attempting to contact all parents by phone.

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In fall, First Bus will pilot a plan to have a senior student act as a bus monitor. This student will receive training in how to work the two-way radio in case the bus driver becomes incapacitated. Additionally, First Bus has been piloting GPS technology that would allow dispatchers to immediately locate each bus.

At this time, the Board of Education wishes to state to students and their families that it is very sorry the May 30 incident occurred. All trustees recognize the incident was extremely distressing for children and their families. The board is genuinely grateful for the input parents have offered as the school division developed a new plan to ensure communicating quickly and effectively with parents is a priority during a transportation emergency.

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For further information, please contact:

Donella Hoffman
Communications Consultant
Greater Saskatoon Catholic Schools
659.7077 – office
229.3743 – cell

TRANSPORTATION COMMUNICATION PROTOCOL

This protocol is intended to be the guideline to be followed in the event of a student transportation emergency such as vehicular accident, medical problem with bus driver or passenger or loss of contact with a bus. Loss of contact is defined as a period of 10 minutes in which the bus is unable to be reached via radio contact.

ORGANIZATION:

Each school and the Board Office will establish a Transportation Emergency Team having a minimum of 3 staff members. In the schools, the team will consist of the school principal as well as 2 other members to be chosen by the principal. The Board Office team will consist of: Superintendent of Administrative Services (liaison person), the Manager of Corporate Services and Communications Consultant. Unit Superintendents will become members as the circumstances dictate.

The main purpose of the school and the Board Office transportation emergency teams will be to maintain lines of communication with key personnel and groups who require information to manage the incident and bring aid and comfort to the students and parents/guardians involved in the incident. Contact with members of the media will be the sole responsibility of the Superintendent of Administrative Services and the Communications Consultant.

ACTIONS

(A.M. Bus Trip Home to School):

First Bus will:

1. Contact police via 911.
2. Contact the school with accurate and precise details of the emergency.
3. Contact the school division liaison person at the Board Office with accurate and precise details of the emergency.
4. As the phone calls described in steps 1 through 3 are occurring, place an appropriate message on the "Late Bus Phone Line".
5. Begin phoning parents to inform them an incident has occurred. (If First Bus personnel require assistance phoning parents, they will request assistance from the school.)
6. Dispatch the Safety Officer to the scene, along with an additional bus as a precautionary measure.
7. Ensure children and bus driver remain at the scene until cleared by the police to leave. Children will not be allowed to leave with anyone other than their own parent.
8. Transport children to school once clearance is received from the police.
9. Maintain constant communication with school division liaison person at the Board Office and school Transportation Emergency Team, supplying accurate and precise updates on the situation
10. Contact parents with a follow-up phone call on the day of the incident.

The school team will:

1. Assist FirstBus with initial phone calls to parents to inform them an incident has occurred.
2. Dispatch a team member to the site to give aid and comfort to the children.
3. Ensure children and bus driver remain at the scene until cleared by the Police to leave. Children will not be allowed to leave with anyone other than their own parent.
4. Maintain contact with parents, giving accurate and precise updates on the situation
5. Ensure one or more members of the Transportation Emergency Team is available at the school to communicate with parents choosing to pick up their children.
6. Alert Tragic Events Response Team, which will attend to the children, parents and school personnel as needed.
7. Ensure that parents who are not communicated with in-person receive a follow-up phone call on the same day as the incident.

Board Office team will:

1. Maintain open communication with FirstBus.
2. Maintain open communication with the school.
3. Ensure Board Chair and Director of Education are kept abreast of the situation.
4. Direct any media inquiries to the Superintendent of Administrative Services and/or the Communications Consultant, who will have sole responsibility to communicate with the media.

Parent/Legal Guardian will:

1. Ensure school/First Bus always has most up-to-date contact information concerning your child/children.
2. After learning of an incident, ensure he/she can be reached by telephone for information updates.
3. Check with the FirstBus "Late Bus Phone Line" for up-to-date information.
4. If choosing to have the child not attend school, pick up your child at school when cleared to do so.
5. Provide written permission if another person is to pick up your child.

ACTIONS:

(P.M. Bus Trip - School to Home):

First Bus will:

1. Contact police via 911.
2. Contact the school giving accurate and precise details of the emergency.
3. Contact the school division liaison person at the Board Office providing accurate and precise details of the emergency.
4. As the phone calls described in steps 1 through 3 are occurring, place an appropriate message on the "Late Bus Phone Line."
5. Begin phoning parents to inform them an incident has occurred. (If First Bus personnel require assistance phoning parents, they will request assistance from the school.)
6. Dispatch Safety Officer to the scene, along with an additional bus as a precautionary measure.
7. Ensure children and bus driver remain at the scene until cleared by the Police to leave. Children will not be allowed to leave with anyone other than their own parent.
8. Transport children to school once clearance is received from the police.
9. Maintain constant communication with the school division liaison person at the Board Office and school Transportation Emergency Team, supplying accurate and precise updates on the situation
10. Contact parents with a follow-up phone call on the day of the incident.

School team will:

1. Assist FirstBus with initial phone calls to parents to inform them an incident has occurred.
2. Dispatch a team member to the site to give aid and comfort to the children.
3. Ensure children and bus driver remain at the scene until cleared by the Police to leave. Children will not be allowed to leave with anyone other than own parent.
4. Maintain contact with parents giving accurate and precise updates on the situation.
5. Ensure one or more members of the Transportation Emergency Team is available at the school to communicate with parents choosing to pick up their children.
6. Alert Tragic Events Response Team, which will attend to the children, parents and school personnel as needed.
7. Ensure that parents who are not communicated with in-person receive a follow-up phone call the same day as the incident has occurred.

Board Office team will:

1. Maintain open communication with FirstBus.
2. Maintain open communication with the school.
3. Ensure Board Chair and Director of Education are kept abreast of the situation.
4. Direct any media inquiries to the Superintendent of Administrative Services and/or the Communications Consultant, who will have sole responsibility to communicate with the media.

Parent/Legal Guardian:

1. Ensure school/First Bus always has the most up-to-date contact information concerning your child/children.
2. After learning of an incident, ensure he/she can be reached by telephone for information updates.
3. Check with the FirstBus "Late Bus Phone Line" for up-to-date information.
4. If choosing to have the child not attend school, pick up your child at the school when cleared to do so.
5. Provide written permission if another person is to pick up your child.