



Toronto school board ban on U.S. trips

A number of you have contacted Motor Coach Canada regarding media reports this week, on the fact that the Toronto District School Board (TDSB) instituted a ban on U.S.-bound trips because of the uncertainty surrounding the Trump administration's policies regarding entry into the U.S.

To clarify, the TDSB policy states that for the moment, the 24 existing trips will go ahead as booked; however, if even one student with proper documentation is denied entry, the entire trip will be cancelled and the whole group will return to Toronto. Furthermore, these existing trips will be cancelled immediately if the U.S. enacts any rules that would bar certain students from crossing the border. Pending the legal and political battles over President Trump's travel ban, the trips will be cancelled if such a policy is put in place. Effective immediately, given the uncertainty, no future trips to the U.S. will be planned until there is more clarity around U.S. border policy and more certainty that students with appropriate documentation and status in Canada will be allowed entry regardless of their or their parents' country of origin.

This is an extremely unfortunate development.

The TDSB is not the first to institute such a ban – school boards in other parts of the country, including Vancouver, Winnipeg, and southwestern Ontario, have either cancelled all or some U.S.-bound trips for students. Two weeks ago, the Girl Guides of Canada announced that they were cancelling all U.S. bound trips indefinitely.

The Toronto decision is particularly troubling because, as the largest school board in Canada, its decision will likely create a wave for other school boards to follow suit. The intense media coverage on this ban increases the risk that others will follow in the days and weeks ahead.

The reason for these decisions is the principle that if in any group (e.g. class, team) there are one or more students who have proper documentation and legal status in Canada who are going to be denied admission to the U.S. because of a blanket travel ban policy, then the institution or organizer does not want to be placed in the position of saying, "Well, these eighteen students can go, but the two of you can't because you or your parents were born in the wrong country." They take the view that either we all go, or no one goes. In their minds, by banning some, the U.S. policy effectively bans all.

This is a complex and difficult issue, and there is more confusion and misinformation than solid facts behind some of these decisions, but given the chaotic state of U.S. policy on the travel ban, school boards and others are erring on the side of caution until the situation

becomes more clear. Hopefully the travel ban issue will be resolved quickly and in a reasonable and pragmatic manner.

However, until then, there will continue to be challenges when booking and organizing school trips to the U.S. Motor Coach Canada will continue to work with tour operators, coach operators, and suppliers on both sides of the border to try and manage these challenges by keeping you up to date on developments and by working with government officials at all levels to make them aware of the impact of these policies.

In the meantime, if you have any questions or concerns, please don't hesitate to contact us.