

Hello parents, students, staff and community,

Ey Swayel

At the beginning of the suspension of in-class instruction in March, we began doing regular video messages to keep people informed about what was happening in our schools in response to the pandemic. We received a great deal of feedback that the messages were appreciated and so, as we head toward September, we intend to keep creating ways to message to our community what you can expect for your schools and your children when schools open on Sept. 8th.

Yesterday, the Government announced a plan to open schools in September and I wanted to provide an update on some of the central elements of the announcement, what it means for us and what we will begin doing to plan for September when our students arrive back to school.

First and foremost, we are very pleased to receive an update on the plans for September at this time. The earlier we get information, the better prepared we can be for September while we continue to plan to provide quality education during a pandemic.

I want to highlight what we heard in the announcement for September and I want to underscore that the new plan has only just been announced and there is lots for us to digest and to consider as we move forward. For this message, I've chosen to comment on a couple key items that will shape your child's education and the structures of our schools.

First, the Ministry's 5 Stage Education Restart Plan has been updated to remove the concept of density. As you may recall, density was a term for the total enrolment permitted in a school, such as 25% of all students attending on any given day. In this update, density has been replaced with a decision to have all students attend schools in cohorts. In this way, the government feels that we can provide opportunities for more students while still keeping COVID under control to the greatest extent possible.

What is a cohort? For education, a cohort refers to one group of students and staff who remain together for learning and other activities. In elementary schools, cohorts will remain intact for up to one year and will include up to 60 students. In our secondary schools, cohorts will include up to 120 students and staff and will remain intact for a term and new cohorts will form to begin new terms as they emerge throughout the school year. In this concept, students will still be in classes, but these classes can learn and interact together. It's very similar to expanding your contacts in the community, but it limits the close contacts to 60 or 120 in our schools.

The intent of Government, under the advice of our Provincial Health Officer, is that having students travelling in cohorts will keep contact at a minimum and will provide the greatest opportunity for contact tracing should any COVID outbreak occur. This is health's guidance to how we can continue to have our schools operate safely and to have as many children in school as possible.

In our elementary schools, the concept of classes remaining together for a year is very familiar to parents, students and staff and we anticipate a full return to school for 100% of our students.

In our secondary schools, the concept of cohorts is well known, but typically our secondary schools are structured to have students move in different groups from block to block throughout the day. Forming cohorts of 120 students and staff and having those groups remain together will require changing our timetables. Secondary timetables are normally designed around student choice and we will begin with student choice to look at the structures we now need for September with students in a few classes working together as a cohort.

The announcement also includes the ability and importance of still providing hybrid or online learning as part of our secondary programs. As we look toward September, we know that students still need access to the normal range of courses and there are teachers with unique skill sets that will need to be able to access students across cohorts. Practicing appropriate physical distancing, both students and staff may be permitted to work across different cohorts. In our early planning, we again want to focus on students getting the courses and instruction they need to progress in their learning. This means access to art, band, calculus, biology, woodwork, foods and the enormous range of courses we offer. While it will indeed look different in September, this is our starting point.

Our secondary schools are all well over 1000 students with some as large as 2000 students. It may not be possible in our very large secondary schools to have all students in attendance full time and we are examining hybrid models that include both face to face and online learning. These hybrid models are intended to support students remaining attached to their neighbourhood school and to their cohort.

One other aspect of the announcement, is that attending school will not be voluntary. Dr. Bonnie Henry says that schools are safe places to be and it's time to have schools back in full operation. We want all children in school, we will work within the bounds of the Health Guidelines to develop structures for quality learning for all children and we look forward to welcoming our students to school in the fall.

Parents, staff and students will have many questions including what does it look like to physical distance with class size back to normal? What about Teachers Teaching on Call and other adults who need to move across cohorts? Will my child still get the courses that they need? What will my child's daily routine or timetable look like in September? What if I am uncomfortable sending my child to school? Will our students still get to roam, play and meet their friends? What about extra-curricular activities? What about Personal Protective Equipment – when and how will it be used?

There is much more for us to consider and to unpack as we work with the new guidelines and protocols. Again, at this time, we simply wanted to provide people with an update on what has been announced. There is much work to do and we commit to having a second message out to our community by the end of next week with more details. There is much more information for us to bring your way. Our commitment is to do that soon.

Our school principals, vice-principals and staff worked extremely hard at the end of June to consider options and examples of what September may look like. We are grateful for their dedication and hard work. We are very pleased that we did that preliminary work and now we

need to put that advanced thinking and planning into effect as we make changes based on this new information.

Our school staffs, including principals and vice-principals are enjoying a very well deserved summer break. Last year was an extraordinary year and much like spring break, this news comes while people are away. We will digest, analyze, and then get to work to create the best possible opportunities for our students in the fall and we will be communicating with you again soon and we hope that you are enjoying a restful, safe and healthy summer.

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