

Hello all, Ey Swayel

I am so thankful to be recording what might be my last COVID video message. With that, it's a few minutes longer and I apologize for that but there's a lot to say. For today, I want to cover three things:

1. An acknowledgement of National Indigenous Peoples Day
2. An update on COVID – what can parents and students expect in September; and
3. A message of gratitude and hope for the summer and fall.

It's my pleasure to speak to you today from the unceded traditional territory of the Semiahmoo, Katzie and Kwantlen First Nations. It's their lands on which the Surrey school district resides, and this acknowledgement is always important but particularly on today which is National Indigenous Peoples' Day across Canada. Today is the 25th anniversary of celebrating the diverse heritage, cultures and achievements of First Nations, Inuit and Metis people.

In recognition of that day and honouring the leadership of Indigenous communities in Surrey, I want to specifically thank the Aboriginal Education Council for its recent co-creation of a joint statement on the Kamloops Residential School burial site. The statement includes the voices of many partners and Indigenous leaders across Surrey and we are thankful for their thoughtful support and partnership with us.

I also want to thank the Fraser Regional Aboriginal Friendship Centre Association and the City of Surrey for partnering with us in creating a virtual celebration today. Hosted by Katzie, Kwantlen and Semiahmoo First Nations, students across Surrey will get a chance to come together to share and celebrate Indigenous leadership, history and culture.

There has been a lot of information this week about COVID and the fall and I wanted to share what we hope September looks like.

It's important to understand the differences and overlap between BC's Restart plan and BC's Education Restart Plan. BC's restart plan has 4 steps. Step 1 was about getting 60% of the population vaccinated and that's done. June 15th marked the easing of restrictions across BC. For examples, you can have outdoor birthday parties, you can travel across BC and you can have a dinner at a restaurant in small groups not restricted to your household. This is the phase we're all in right now and I'm sure you can feel and see the difference in your community.

On July 1st, we enter into an important new phase with over 70% of our community vaccinated. Recreational travel is permitted Canada-wide. We return to usual for indoor and outdoor personal gatherings. There is no limit on indoor and outdoor dining, and you can attend a fitness class as usual. Clearly life starts to look normal but we still see that things like masks are recommended in indoor public settings.

Then, as long as COVID case counts and hospitalizations stay low, the fourth and final phase of BC's restart plan is timed with the opening day of school on Sept. 7th. Masks are a personal choice, social contact is normal, and life will look much as it did pre-pandemic. There no doubt will still be COVID

safety plans in place, but life will look pretty normal with things like concerts and large gatherings indoors and outdoors. I am sure we all look forward to that time.

What's most important here to underscore for parents, is that this is a BC Restart plan and we have yet to receive the full guidelines for school but clearly September is anticipated to look like school as we have always known it. The K-12 Education plan will be aligned with the BC Restart Plan.

In the meantime, as we close of this school year and as we head into things like summer school, we continue to follow the health and safety protocols that are in place. Nothing has changed and we remain vigilant.

We are anticipating updated Health and Safety Guidelines for our schools in mid to late August. When those come, here's are some things that you likely can expect for the fall when school doors open:

- The concept of learning groups and cohort will be eliminated. Students are free to socialize and interact as normal;
- Instruction will be 100% face to face at both elementary and secondary;
- There will be no blended or transition programs;
- Clubs, teams, and other sporting and social activities will resume;
- Food services will be back to normal;
- There likely will continue to be guidance on "crowding";
- Cleaning protocols will be less stringent but will still be in place;
- Field trips will return;
- Personal health and safety checks and reminders of hygiene will remain; and
- We await guidance on masks but we note that masks are "a personal choice" in the BC Restart Plan.

All of the above again, will be aligned with the broader BC Restart Plan and we await the specific details for schools. Regardless, all signs are that we anticipate a return to school as we knew it pre-pandemic.

All of the above is only possible because of an enormous collective effort through the pandemic. As I record this message, I wanted to look at where we are on cases. In the past 5 days, we have had 5 notices of exposures and 14 people have been asked to self-isolate. In contrast, I randomly chose a day in April as a comparator. On that one single day, we had 17 notices of exposure, 57 individuals including 11 staff members along with 7 full classes were put into self-isolation. This is the contrast of where we are to where we were. It's a remarkable change and so welcomed.

I wrote a blog recently to say that I don't know how to adequately say thank you. There are so many to thank. To parents for having the faith in us to send your children to school. To our staff who, particularly those on the front lines in our schools, have lived COVID up close and personal for over a year, to the students who, despite all that has gone on, continue to laugh, learn and move forward. It certainly has been a year unlike any other. It certainly is a year we do not wish to repeat, but at the same time, it's been a year when we have realized just how much we miss and need that personal connection. The



value of a smile and a laugh cannot be undersold. When the doors open in September and we see and hear the laughter and play of small children and we see our teens gathering in their usual social circles there will be so much to celebrate. When the Graduation Class of 2022 crosses the stage together, we will be able to look back and say, together, we did it.

Congratulations, I hope that all of you get the rest and relaxation you need and deserve this summer. See you in September.

Hy'ce:pka