



September 3, 2020

Dear Families,

We are excited to be nearing the full return of students next week. This has been a remarkable past 6 months, and we know that just as there is excitement, there is also anxiety, and that is understandable. There is a lot of information out there, and not all of it helpful. Context is important. BC remains in very good shape and people's buy-in to physical distancing and handwashing has had noticeable impact. Even in our urban settings, where most of the COVID-19 cases have occurred, the risk is low. We are very fortunate to live in a rural part of the province, and our lower population density combined with better physical distancing and hygiene has helped keep our region very safe from the pandemic. However, we cannot be complacent.

That is why our community and our schools are following the same rigorous health, cleaning and distancing requirements that apply to metro areas. While the adults in our buildings will remain 2 meters apart (where possible), the B.C. Centre for Disease Control recognizes that social distancing is not always feasible and is not expected in classrooms. Instead we will be encouraging children to avoid direct physical contact, as well as focusing on how children and staff can move around safely in a school environment. Through these efforts, our communities and our schools remain very safe. Moreover, our schools remain one of the best controlled, clean environments during this pandemic. We know:

- instances of COVID-19 have been remarkably low across our region
- transmission to and across children is very low

The Provincial Health Authority has had schools create cohorts that are designed to help health authorities trace potential contacts if and when positive cases occur. The cohort structure is the primary difference elementary children will encounter as it will limit the interactions across the day. However, limited interactions are significantly better than the continued social isolation of children.

Secondary schools, as communicated earlier, have more significant changes in order to limit cohorts. We also have some limitations on school sports and other events we have come to count on. Clearly these changes are not ideal, but we are working to find solutions as we learn to live and function with COVID-19, as we have with other pandemics over time.

In all our school settings, it is imperative that our staff and students stay home if they are feeling sick. If someone becomes sick while at school, staff will follow the plan created and approved by the Ministry of Health for all schools across the province.

“Learning, Growing and Belonging Together”



We are all in this together, and I hope we will all provide the calm and confidence to our children and our communities that enables them to be resilient and look to the future with the bright optimism of youth.

Our schools will be have staff orientation regarding the new procedures on September 8 and 9 and we look forward to seeing students on the 10 and 11. If you are struggling with what to do for your child's educational program, please contact your local school to discuss their plans, and keep close our context, population and relatively small schools that all help in our ability to move forward safely.

We will also be engaging in a **virtual Town Hall** with Interior Health on **Wednesday, September 9th at 5pm** to have the experts answer remaining questions. Please send in your questions to info@sd27.bc.ca so we can prepare for the session. The Town Hall Link will be posted on the website and through social media. We also have begun to compile our own [FAQ's document](#).

The health and safety of our students and staff is our primary concern. We are truly excited to have them back together next week.

Sincerely,

Chris van der Mark
Superintendent of Schools