

August 23, 2021

## Re: Back-To-School Guide for Parents and Legal Guardians

Dear parents and legal guardians:

September is almost upon us, and with it, the beginning of the school year. After a year of living in the midst of COVID-19, it seems that there is a light at the end of the tunnel. While the health situation in Manitoba is improving, we must remain vigilant as a fourth wave is still possible. The Division scolaire franco-manitobaine (DSFM) has an obligation, as an educational and public organization, to ensure that its schools are safe and caring, both for its students and its employees as outlined in The Manitoba Public Schools Act and also in The Workplace Safety and Health Act:

*41(1) Every school board shall*

*b.1) ensure that each pupil enrolled in a school within the jurisdiction of the school board is provided with a safe and caring school environment that fosters and maintains respectful and responsible behaviours<sup>1</sup>.*

*4(1) Every employer shall in accordance with the objects and purpose of this Act*

*a) ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, the safety, health and welfare at work of all his workers<sup>2</sup>.*

*4(2) a) Without limiting the generality of an employer's duty under subsection (1), every employer shall*

*a) provide and maintain a workplace, necessary equipment, systems and tools that are safe and without risk to health, so far as is reasonably practicable<sup>3</sup>.*

Please note that these are temporary measures. The DSFM will re-evaluate the health situation every four to six weeks to ensure that the challenges regarding the pandemic are addressed. In the event of an outbreak in one of our schools, the DSFM will take the necessary steps to ensure the safety of all. We will keep you informed of any changes or status quo.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://web2.gov.mb.ca/laws/statutes/ccsm/p250e.php>

<sup>2</sup> <https://web2.gov.mb.ca/laws/statutes/ccsm/w210e.php>

<sup>3</sup> <https://web2.gov.mb.ca/laws/statutes/ccsm/w210e.php>

## Four Priority Areas of the Department of Education

The following are the four priority areas put forth by the Department of Education for this upcoming school year:

1. Following health and safety measures as per public health guidance
2. Promoting mental health and well-being
3. Assessing and addressing learning impacts
4. Vaccinating Manitobans through outreach and promotion

The division staff will work very closely with the schools to ensure that all four of the priority areas are met.

## Return to Class – September 2021

This new school year is expected to be a return to near-normalcy for our students and staff, which is a welcome relief from a difficult past year for all. That being said, we cannot ignore the fact that the potential risk of transmission remains and that a fourth wave is emerging in Manitoba, as indicated by Dr. Brent Roussin, the province's Chief Public Health Officer, on June 28.

We must not let our guard down and put children, adults and communities at risk. We have an obligation to act with caution.

In order to ensure a safe return, the Division scolaire franco-manitobaine will implement the following guidelines:

### Inside the School

- Masks will be mandatory inside the school and on buses for Kindergarten to Grade 12 students, except for students who have a medical note.
- If a classroom can achieve a minimum physical distancing of two (2) meters, students will be able to remove the mask while seated at their desk. The mask must be put back on when moving.
- Schools that cannot achieve a physical distancing of two (2) meters will ensure that students have frequent breaks without masks during the day.
- Masks will be mandatory for all staff, except those with a medical note.
- Students in Grades K to 6 will be placed in cohorts.
- Extracurricular activities and sports will be offered, but within the guidelines of the MHSAA and Public Health.
- Choir as well as wind instrument practices will be permitted following the physical distancing guidelines.
- Student movement within the school will be permitted, but always following the physical distancing guidelines and the use of cohorts if applicable.
- The use of restrooms in the most populous schools will require a schedule that includes cleaning times.
- Libraries will be open. However, users will be required to clean their hands before entering.\*

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\* The DSFM must take into account that some schools are home to a public library and therefore will work with local authorities.

- Only immunocompromised students will be eligible for remote learning at home. A medical note will be required.
- For the beginning of the school year, we will eliminate large assemblies and gatherings to minimize transmission.
- Although public health allows for community use of schools, the use of our premises by outside groups will not be permitted at the beginning of the school year.
- Schools will need to ensure that sharing of food and water bottles does not occur.

### **Outdoor Area of the School**

- Recess is important for students as it allows them to get some fresh air and stretch their legs. Depending on the number of students in a school and the size of the yard, recess times may be staggered.
- A schedule for the use of outdoor play structures will be established based on cohorts. Schools will also ensure (for Grades K to 8) that outdoor play areas are marked off so that cohorts do not come into contact.
- Students in Grades 9 to 12 will be able to eat in a room in the school or go out to eat outside the school. Please note that students who leave the school grounds must follow the health measures that apply to Manitobans. Also, in order to avoid frequent trips to and from school, students will not be permitted to return to school until the start of classes offered after lunch.
- Each school will provide supervision during this time.
- The use of outdoor space for in-class learning is encouraged, weather permitting.

### **Student Services**

- Students with special learning needs will be well supported. Personalized educational plans will be updated in September. Individualized interventions will also be permitted.
- Local support staff and the divisional student services team will also ensure that materials, tools, etc. are available to teachers.
- For students who cannot attend school due to health reasons, we will ensure that they receive an education appropriate to their needs.
- If certain accommodations need to be made to meet the needs of certain students, the DSFM will address them where feasible.
- For students who are medically compromised and require a medical note, the DSFM will work with local health authorities to ensure that arrangements are in place for a safe return. If this is not possible, these students will be eligible for remote learning.

### **School Transportation**

- We will try to group students of the same cohort together as well as siblings. The Province's instruction is that we return to pre-COVID-19 policies and practices but maintain bus cleaning and the use of masks for everyone aboard.
- We will make sure to keep the windows open to allow for better air circulation when possible.
- Students will be required to remain in the same seat until new instructions are issued.
- Students with symptoms of COVID-19 should not attend school or board the bus.
- Bus drivers with symptoms of COVID-19 should not drive buses.
- All passengers and bus drivers must wash their hands before entering and exiting the bus.
- Where bus capacity permits, the seat directly behind the driver will be left vacant.

## Fire Drills

Fire drills must continue to be conducted. However, the Office of the Fire Commissioner has indicated that the ten required fire drills can be conducted with the public health advice:

- a) evacuating a section of the school or a number of classrooms separately
- b) evacuating classrooms one at a time at different times
- c) conducting fire drills on different days

## Religious Exercises and Instruction

In some of our schools, parents and legal guardians have exercised the right recognized by the school act for their children to participate in either religious exercises or instruction. The DSFM recognizes this right and will attempt, with all the constraints related to the challenge of gathering and physical distancing, to maintain these exercises. As each school presents a different situation, it will be up to principals to verify whether the continuation of this practice is possible and to communicate to parents and legal guardians possible adjustments.

## Health Measures

- Health measures (self-assessment, hand hygiene, etc.) remain an important barrier to transmission, so we will continue to implement these measures.
- Cleaning and disinfecting measures will be maintained.
- The cleaning cycle of ventilation systems will be maintained.

## Presence of Symptoms

In the case of individuals showing any symptom(s) of COVID-19, the principal will send them home. The individual will be required to be tested or remain in isolation.

## Physical Distancing During Visits


- As a parent or legal guardian, please ensure that when you drop off or pick up your child at school, your child is at least two (2) meters away from other children.
- Avoid visits to the school. If you need to contact a staff member or the principal, we ask that you either call or email them.

## Visitors and Volunteers

- In order to minimize the risk of transmission, we ask that parents who need to visit the school make an appointment with the principal who is responsible for the entry and exit of visitors. In this regard, it is preferable to communicate by telephone or video.
- When a visitor or volunteer arrives, after making an appointment, we ask that he or she has completed a self-assessment using the Department of Health tool. He or she will also be required to clean his or her hands and, if he or she is to meet a staff member, to wear a mask. Physical distancing requirements will also be enforced throughout their visit. If the person refuses to comply with these requirements, they will not be permitted to enter the school.
- The school must keep a record of all visitors.
- As for visitors, it will be important to prioritize individuals who are directly related to the implementation of health and education measures: nurses, student teachers, meal program volunteers, etc.

Once again, we would like to remind you that these measures will be reviewed periodically. Like you, we hope to return to some degree of normalcy soon.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Alain Laberge".

Alain Laberge  
Superintendent